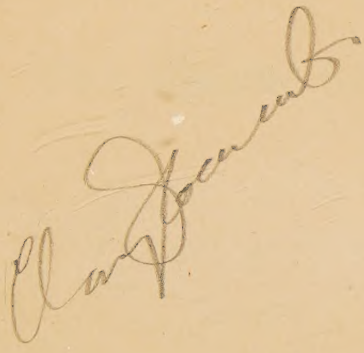
The Agony Column

EARL DERR BIGGERS



The Agony Column

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A Warner Bros. Talking Picture. The Agony Column, Photoplay The Second Floor Mystery.
GEOFFREY ASKS MARIAN TO FORGIVE HIM.

THE SECOND FLOOR MYSTERY

PHOTOPLAY TITLE OF

THE AGONY COLUMN

BY

EARL DERR BIGGERS

AUTHOR OF

SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE,
BEHIND THAT CURTAIN,
THE CHINESE PARROT, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE
WARNER BROS. TALKING PICTURE

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The Agony Column

CHAPTER I

LONDON, that historic summer, was almost unbearably hot. It seems, looking back, as though the big baking city in those days was meant to serve as an anteroom of torture —an inadequate bit of preparation for the hell that was soon to break in the guise of the Great War. About the soda-water bar in the drug store near the Hotel Cecil many American tourists found solace in the sirups and creams of home. Through the open windows of the Piccadilly tea shops you might catch glimpses of the English consuming quarts of hot tea in

order to become cool. It is a paradox they swear by.

About nine o'clock on the morning of Friday, July twenty-fourth, in that memorable year nineteen hundred and fourteen, Geoffrey West left his apartments in Adelphi Terrace and set out for breakfast at the Carlton. He had found the breakfast room of that dignified hotel the coolest in London, and through some miracle, for the season had passed, strawberries might still be had there. As he took his way through the crowded Strand, surrounded on all sides by honest British faces wet with honest British perspiration he thought longingly of his rooms in Washington Square, New York. For West, despite the English sound of that Geoffrey, was as American as Kansas, his native state, and only pressing business

was at that moment holding him in England, far from the country that glowed unusually rosy because of its remoteness.

At the Carlton news stand West bought two morning papers—the *Times* for study and the *Mail* for entertainment—and then passed on into the restaurant. His waiter—a tall soldierly Prussian, more blond than West himself—saw him coming and, with a nod and a mechanical German smile, set out for the plate of strawberries which he knew would be the first thing desired by the American. West seated himself at his usual table and, spreading out the *Daily Mail,* sought his favorite column. The first item in that column brought a delighted smile to his face:

"The one who calls me Dearest is not genuine or they would write to me."

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Any one at all familiar with English journalism will recognize at once what department it was that appealed most to West. During his three weeks in London he had been following, with the keenest joy, the daily grist of Personal Notices in the *Mail*. This string of intimate messages, popularly known as the Agony Column, has long been an honored institution in the English press. In the days of Sherlock Holmes it was in the *Times* that it flourished, and many a criminal was tracked to earth after he had inserted some alluring mysterious message in it. Later the *Telegraph* gave it room; but, with the advent of halfpenny journalism, the simple souls moved en masse to the *Mail*.

Tragedy and comedy mingle in the Agony Column. Erring ones are urged to

return for forgiveness; unwelcome suitors are warned that "Father has warrant prepared; fly, Dearest One!" Loves that would shame by their ardor Abelard and Héloïse are frankly published—at ten cents a word—for all the town to smile at. The gentleman in the brown derby states with fervor that the blonde governess who got off the tram at Shepherd's Bush has quite won his heart. Will she permit his addresses? Answer; this department. For three weeks West had found this sort of thing delicious reading. Best of all, he could detect in these messages nothing that was not open and innocent. At their worst they were merely an effort to side-step old Lady Convention; this inclination was so rare in the British, he felt it should be encouraged. Besides, he was inordinately fond of mystery and ro-

mance, and these engaging twins hovered always about that column.

So, while waiting for his strawberries, he smiled over the ungrammatical outburst of the young lady who had come to doubt the genuineness of him who called her Dearest. He passed on to the second item of the morning. Spoke one whose heart had been completely conquered:

MY LADY sleeps. She of raven tresses. Corner seat from Victoria, Wednesday night. Carried program. Gentleman answering inquiry desires acquaintance. Reply here.—LE ROI.

West made a mental note to watch for the reply of raven tresses. The next message proved to be one of Aye's lyrics—now almost a daily feature of the column:

DEAREST: Tender loving wishes to my dear one. Only to be with you now and

always. None "fairer in my eyes." Your name is music to me. I love you more than life itself, my own beautiful darling, my proud sweetheart, my joy, my all! Jealous of everybody. Kiss your dear hands for me. Love you only. Thine ever.—AYE.

Which, reflected West, was generous of Aye—at ten cents a word—and in striking contrast to the penurious lover who wrote, farther along in the column:

——loveu dearly; wantocu; longing; missu——

But those extremely personal notices ran not alone to love. Mystery, too, was present, especially in the aquatic utterance:

DEFIANT MERMAID: Not mine. Alligators bitingu now. 'Tis well; delighted. —FIRST FISH.

And the rather sanguinary suggestion:

DE BOX: First round; tooth gone. Finale. You will FORGET ME NOT.

At this point West's strawberries arrived and even the Agony Column could not hold his interest. When the last red berry was eaten he turned back to read:

WATERLOO: Wed. 11:53 train. Lady who left in taxi and waved, care to know gent, gray coat?—SINCERE.

Also the more dignified request put forward in:

GREAT CENTRAL: Gentleman who saw lady in bonnet 9 Monday morning in Great Central Hotel lift would greatly value opportunity of obtaining introduction.

This exhausted the joys of the Agony

Column for the day, and West, like the solid citizen he really was, took up the *Times* to discover what might be the morning's news. A great deal of space was given to the appointment of a new principal for Dulwich College. The affairs of the heart, in which that charming creature, Gabrielle Ray, was at the moment involved, likewise claimed attention. And in a quite unimportant corner, in a most unimportant manner, it was related that Austria had sent an ultimatum to Serbia. West had read part way through this stupid little piece of news, when suddenly the Thunderer and all its works became an uninteresting blur.

A girl stood just inside the door of the Carlton breakfast room.

Yes; he should have pondered that despatch from Vienna. But such a girl! It

adds nothing at all to say that her hair was a dull sort of gold; her eyes violet. Many girls have been similarly blessed. It was her manner; the sweet way she looked with those violet eyes through a battalion of head waiters and resplendent managers; her air of being at home here in the Carlton or anywhere else that fate might drop her down. Unquestionably she came from oversea—from the States.

She stepped forward into the restaurant. And now slipped also into view, as part of the background for her, a middle-aged man, who wore the conventional black of the statesman. He, too, bore the American label unmistakably. Nearer and nearer to West she drew, and he saw that in her hand she carried a copy of the *Daily Mail.*

West's waiter was a master of the art

of suggesting that no table in the room was worth sitting at save that at which he held ready a chair. Thus he lured the girl and her companion to repose not five feet from where West sat. This accomplished, he whipped out his order book, and stood with pencil poised, like a reporter in an American play.

"The strawberries are delicious," he said in honeyed tones.

The man looked at the girl, a question in his eyes.

"Not for me, dad," she said. "I hate them! Grapefruit, please."

As the waiter hurried past, West hailed him. He spoke in loud defiant tones.

"Another plate of the strawberries!" he commanded. "They are better than ever to-day."

For a second, as though he were part

of the scenery, those violet eyes met his with a casual impersonal glance. Then their owner slowly spread out her own copy of the *Mail*.

"What's the news?" asked the statesman, drinking deep from his glass of water.

"Don't ask me," the girl answered, without looking up. "I've found something more entertaining than news. Do you know—the English papers run humorous columns! Only they aren't called that. They're called Personal Notices. And such notices!" She leaned across the table. "Listen to this: 'Dearest: Tender loving wishes to my dear one. Only to be with you now and always. None "fairer in my eyes"—' "

The man looked uncomfortably about

him. "Hush!" he pleaded. "It doesn't sound very nice to me."

"Nice!" cried the girl. "Oh, but it is —quite nice. And so deliciously open and aboveboard. 'Your name is music to me. I love you more—'"

"What do we see to-day?" put in her father hastily.

"We're going down to the City and have a look at the Temple. Thackeray lived there once — and Oliver Goldsmith—"

"All right—the Temple it is."

"Then the Tower of London. It's full of the most romantic associations. Especially the Bloody Tower, where those poor little princes were murdered. Aren't you thrilled?"

"I am if you say so."

"You're a dear! I promise not to tell the people back in Texas that you showed any interest in kings and such—if you will show just a little. Otherwise I'll spread the awful news that you took off your hat when King George went by."

The statesman smiled. West felt that he, who had no business to, was smiling with him.

The waiter returned, bringing grapefruit, and the strawberries West had ordered. Without another look toward West, the girl put down her paper and began her breakfasting. As often as he dared, however, West looked at her. With patriotic pride he told himself: "Six months in Europe, and the most beautiful thing I've seen comes from back home!"

When he rose reluctantly twenty min-

utes later his two compatriots were still at table, discussing their plans for the day. As is usual in such cases, the girl arranged, the man agreed.

With one last glance in her direction, West went out on the parched pavement of Haymarket.

Slowly he walked back to his rooms. Work was waiting there for him; but, instead of getting down to it, he sat on the balcony of his study, gazing out on the courtyard that had been his chief reason for selecting those apartments. Here, in the heart of the city, was a bit of the countryside transported—the green, trim, neatly tailored countryside that is the most satisfying thing in England. There were walls on which the ivy climbed high, narrow paths that ran between blooming beds of flowers, and opposite

his windows a seldom-opened, most romantic gate. As he sat looking down he seemed to see there below him the girl of the Carlton. Now she sat on the rustic bench; now she bent above the envious flowers; now she stood at the gate that opened out to a hot sudden bit of the city.

And as he watched her there in the garden she would never enter, as he reflected unhappily that probably he would see her no more—the idea came to him.

At first he put it from him as absurd, impossible. She was, to apply a fine word much abused, a lady; he supposedly a gentleman. Their sort did not do such things. If he yielded to this temptation she would be shocked, angry, and from him would slip that one chance in a thousand he had—the chance of meeting her somewhere, some day.

And yet—and yet— She, too, had found the Agony Column entertaining and—quite nice. There was a twinkle in her eyes that bespoke a fondness for romance. She was human, fun-loving—and, above all, the joy of youth was in her heart.

Nonsense! West went inside and walked the floor. The idea was preposterous. Still—he smiled—it was filled with amusing possibilities. Too bad he must put it forever away and settle down to this stupid work!

Forever away? Well—

On the next morning, which was Saturday, West did not breakfast at the Carlton. The girl, however, did. As she and her father sat down the old man said:

"I see you've got your *Daily Mail.*"

"Of course!" she answered. "I couldn't do without it. Grapefruit—yes."

She began to read. Presently her cheeks flushed and she put the paper down.

"What is it?" asked the Texas statesman.

"To-day," she answered sternly, "you do the British Museum. You've put it off long enough."

The old man sighed. Fortunately he did not ask to see the *Mail*. If he had, a quarter way down the column of personal notices he would have been enraged —or perhaps only puzzled—to read:

CARLTON RESTAURANT: Nine A. M., Friday morning. Will the young woman who preferred grapefruit to strawberries permit the young man who had two plates of the latter to say he will not rest until he discovers some mutual friend, that they may meet and laugh over this column together?

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Lucky for the young man who liked strawberries that his nerve had failed him and he was not present at the Carlton that morning! He would have been quite overcome to see the stern uncompromising look on the beautiful face of a lady at her grapefruit. So overcome, in fact, that he would probably have left the room at once, and thus not seen the mischievous smile that came in time to the lady's face—not seen that she soon picked up the paper again and read, with that smile, to the end of the column.

CHAPTER II

THE next day was Sunday; hence it brought no *Mail*. Slowly it dragged along. At a ridiculously early hour Monday morning Geoffrey West was on the street, seeking his favorite newspaper. He found it, found the Agony Column—and nothing else. Tuesday morning again he rose early, still hopeful. Then and there hope died. The lady at the Carlton deigned no reply.

Well, he had lost, he told himself. He had staked all on this one bold throw; no use. Probably if she thought of him at all it was to label him a cheap joker, a mountebank of the halfpenny press. Richly he deserved her scorn.

On Wednesday he slept late. He was

in no haste to look into the *Daily Mail;* his disappointments of the previous days had been too keen. At last, while he was shaving, he summoned Walters, the caretaker of the building, and sent him out to procure a certain morning paper.

Walters came back bearing rich treasure, for in the Agony Column of that day West, his face white with lather, read joyously:

STRAWBERRY MAN: Only the grapefruit lady's kind heart and her great fondness for mystery and romance move her to answer. The strawberry-mad one may write one letter a day for seven days—to prove that he is an interesting person, worth knowing. Then—we shall see. Address: M. A. L., care Sadie Haight, Carlton Hotel.

All day West walked on air, but with

the evening came the problem of those letters, on which depended, he felt, his entire future happiness. Returning from dinner, he sat down at his desk near the windows that looked out on his wonderful courtyard. The weather was still torrid, but with the night had come a breeze to fan the hot cheek of London. It gently stirred his curtains; rustled the papers on his desk.

He considered. Should he at once make known the eminently respectable person he was, the hopelessly respectable people he knew? Hardly! For then, on the instant, like a bubble bursting, would go for good all mystery and romance, and the lady of the grapefruit would lose all interest and listen to him no more. He spoke solemnly to his rustling curtains.

"No," he said. "We must have mys-

tery and romance. But where—where shall we find them?"

On the floor above he heard the solid tramp of military boots belonging to his neighbor, Captain Stephen Fraser-Freer, of the Twelfth Cavalry, Indian Army, home on furlough from that colony beyond the seas. It was from that room overhead that romance and mystery were to come in mighty store; but Geoffrey West little suspected it at the moment. Hardly knowing what to say, but gaining inspiration as he went along, he wrote the first of seven letters to the lady at the Carlton. And the epistle he dropped in the post box at midnight follows here:

DEAR LADY OF THE GRAPEFRUIT: You are very kind. Also, you are wise. Wise, because into my clumsy little Personal you read nothing that was not there. You

knew it immediately for what it was—the timid tentative clutch of a shy man at the skirts of Romance in passing. Believe me, old Conservatism was with me when I wrote that message. He was fighting hard. He followed me, struggling, shrieking, protesting, to the post box itself. But I whipped him. Glory be! I did for him.

We are young but once, I told him. After that, what use to signal to Romance? The lady at least, I said, will understand. He sneered at that. He shook his silly gray head. I will admit he had me worried. But now you have justified my faith in you. Thank you a million times for that!

Three weeks I have been in this huge, ungainly, indifferent city, longing for the States. Three weeks the Agony Column

has been my sole diversion. And then—through the doorway of the Carlton restaurant—you came—

It is of myself that I must write, I know. I will not, then, tell you what is in my mind—the picture of you I carry. It would mean little to you. Many Texan gallants, no doubt, have told you the same while the moon was bright above you and the breeze was softly whispering through the branches of—the branches of the—of the—

Confound it, I don't know! I have never been in Texas. It is a vice in me I hope soon to correct. All day I intended to look up Texas in the encyclopedia. But all day I have dwelt in the clouds. And there are no reference books in the clouds.

Now I am down to earth in my quiet

study. Pens, ink and paper are before me. I must prove myself a person worth knowing.

From his rooms, they say, you can tell much about a man. But, alas! these peaceful rooms in Adelphi Terrace—I shall not tell the number—were sublet furnished. So if you could see me now you would be judging me by the possessions left behind by one Anthony Bartholomew. There is much dust on them. Judge neither Anthony nor me by that. Judge rather Walters, the caretaker, who lives in the basement with his gray-haired wife. Walters was a gardener once, and his whole life is wrapped up in the courtyard on which my balcony looks down. There he spends his time, while up above the dust gathers in the corners—

Does this picture distress you, my lady?

You should see the courtyard! You would not blame Walters then. It is a sample of Paradise left at our door—that courtyard. As English as a hedge, as neat, as beautiful. London is a roar somewhere beyond; between our court and the great city is a magic gate, forever closed. It was the court that led me to take these rooms.

And, since you are one who loves mystery, I am going to relate to you the odd chain of circumstances that brought me here.

For the first link in that chain we must go back to Interlaken. Have you been there yet? A quiet little town, lying beautiful between two shimmering lakes, with the great Jungfrau itself for scenery. From the dining-room of one lucky hotel you may look up at dinner and watch the

old-rose afterglow light the snow-capped mountain. You would not say then of strawberries: "I hate them." Or of anything else in all the world.

A month ago I was in Interlaken. One evening after dinner I strolled along the main street, where all the hotels and shops are drawn up at attention before the lovely mountain. In front of one of the shops I saw a collection of walking sticks and, since I needed one for climbing, I paused to look them over. I had been at this only a moment when a young Englishman stepped up and also began examining the sticks.

I had made a selection from the lot and was turning away to find the shopkeeper, when the Englishman spoke. He was lean, distinguished-looking, though quite young, and had that well-tubbed appear-

ance which I am convinced is the great factor that has enabled the English to assert their authority over colonies like Egypt and India, where men are not so thoroughly bathed.

"Er—if you'll pardon me, old chap," he said. "Not that stick—if you don't mind my saying so. It's not tough enough for mountain work. I would suggest—"

To say that I was astonished is putting it mildly. If you know the English at all, you know it is not their habit to address strangers, even under the most pressing circumstances. Yet here was one of that haughty race actually interfering in my selection of a stick. I ended by buying the one he preferred, and he strolled along with me in the direction of my hotel, chatting meantime in a fashion far from British.

We stopped at the Kursaal, where we listened to the music, had a drink and threw away a few francs on the little horses. He came with me to the veranda of my hotel. I was surprised, when he took his leave, to find that he regarded me in the light of an old friend. He said he would call on me the next morning.

I made up my mind that Archibald Enwright—for that, he told me, was his name—was an adventurer down on his luck, who chose to forget his British exclusiveness under the stern necessity of getting money somehow, somewhere. The next day, I decided, I should be the victim of a touch.

But my prediction failed; Enwright seemed to have plenty of money. On that first evening I had mentioned to him that I expected shortly to be in London, and

he often referred to the fact. As the time approached for me to leave Interlaken he began to throw out the suggestion that he should like to have me meet some of his people in England. This, also, was unheard of—against all precedent.

Nevertheless, when I said good-by to him he pressed into my hand a letter of introduction to his cousin, Captain Stephen Fraser-Freer, of the Twelfth Cavalry, Indian Army, who, he said, would be glad to make me at home in London, where he was on furlough at the time—or would be when I reached there.

"Stephen's a good sort," said Enwright. "He'll be jolly pleased to show you the ropes. Give him my best, old boy!"

Of course I took the letter. But I puzzled greatly over the affair. What could be the meaning of this sudden warm at-

tachment that Archie had formed for me? Why should he want to pass me along to his cousin at a time when that gentleman, back home after two years in India, would be, no doubt, extremely busy? I made up my mind I would not present the letter, despite the fact that Archie had with great persistence wrung from me a promise to do so. I had met many English gentlemen, and I felt they were not the sort—despite the example of Archie—to take a wandering American to their bosoms when he came with a mere letter.

By easy stages I came on to London. Here I met a friend, just sailing for home, who told me of some sad experiences he had had with letters of introduction—of the cold, fishy, "My-dear-fellow-why-trouble-me-with-it?" stares that had greeted their presentation. Good-heart-

ed men all, he said, but averse to strangers; an ever-present trait in the English —always excepting Archie.

So I put the letter to Captain Fraser-Freer out of my mind. I had business acquaintances here and a few English friends, and I found these, as always, courteous and charming. But it is to my advantage to meet as many people as may be, and after drifting about for a week I set out one afternoon to call on my captain. I told myself that here was an Englishman who had perhaps thawed a bit in the great oven of India. If not, no harm would be done.

It was then that I came for the first time to this house on Adelphi Terrace, for it was the address Archie had given me. Walters let me in, and I learned from him that Captain Fraser-Freer had

not yet arrived from India. His rooms were ready—he had kept them during his absence, as seems to be the custom over here—and he was expected soon. Perhaps—said Walters—his wife remembered the date. He left me in the lower hall while he went to ask her.

Waiting, I strolled to the rear of the hall. And then, through an open window that let in the summer, I saw for the first time that courtyard which is my great love in London — the old ivy-covered walls of brick; the neat paths between the blooming beds; the rustic seat; the magic gate. It was incredible that just outside lay the world's biggest city, with all its poverty and wealth, its sorrows and joys, its roar and rattle. Here was a garden for Jane Austen to people with fine ladies

and courtly gentlemen—here was a garden to dream in, to adore and to cherish.

When Walters came back to tell me that his wife was uncertain as to the exact date when the captain would return, I began to rave about that courtyard. At once he was my friend. I had been looking for quiet lodgings away from the hotel, and I was delighted to find that on the second floor, directly under the captain's rooms, there was a suite to be sublet.

Walters gave me the address of the agents; and, after submitting to an examination that could not have been more severe if I had asked for the hand of the senior partner's daughter, they let me come here to live. The garden was mine!

And the captain? Three days after I

arrived I heard above me, for the first time, the tread of his military boots. Now again my courage began to fail. I should have preferred to leave Archie's letter lying in my desk and know my neighbor only by his tread above me. I felt that perhaps I had been presumptuous in coming to live in the same house with him. But I had represented myself to Walters as an acquaintance of the captain's and the caretaker had lost no time in telling me that "my friend" was safely home.

So one night, a week ago, I got up my nerve and went to the captain's rooms. I knocked. He called to me to enter and I stood in his study, facing him. He was a tall handsome man, fair-haired, mustached—the very figure that you, my lady, in your boarding-school days, would have

wished him to be. His manner, I am bound to admit, was not cordial.

"Captain," I began, "I am very sorry to intrude—" It wasn't the thing to say, of course, but I was fussed. "However, I happen to be a neighbor of yours, and I have here a letter of introduction from your cousin, Archibald Enwright. I met him in Interlaken and we became very good friends."

"Indeed!" said the captain.

He held out his hand for the letter, as though it were evidence at a court-martial. I passed it over, wishing I hadn't come. He read it through. It was a long letter, considering its nature. While I waited, standing by his desk—he hadn't asked me to sit down—I looked about the room. It was much like my own study,

only I think a little dustier. Being on the third floor it was farther from the garden, consequently Walters reached there seldom.

The captain turned back and began to read the letter again. This was decidedly embarrassing. Glancing down, I happened to see on his desk an odd knife, which I fancy he had brought from India. The blade was of steel, dangerously sharp, the hilt of gold, carved to represent some heathen figure.

Then the captain looked up from Archie's letter and his cold gaze fell full upon me.

"My dear fellow," he said, "to the best of my knowledge, I have no cousin named Archibald Enwright."

A pleasant situation, you must admit! It's bad enough when you come to them

with a letter from their mother, but here was I in this Englishman's rooms, boldly flaunting in his face a warm note of commendation from a cousin who did not exist!

"I owe you an apology," I said. I tried to be as haughty as he, and fell short by about two miles. "I brought the letter in good faith."

"No doubt of that," he answered.

"Evidently it was given me by some adventurer for purposes of his own," I went on; "though I am at a loss to guess what they could have been."

"I'm frightfully sorry—really," said he. But he said it with the London inflection, which plainly implies: "I'm nothing of the sort."

A painful pause. I felt that he ought to give me back the letter; but he made no

move to do so. And, of course, I didn't ask for it.

"Ah—er—good night," said I, and hurried toward the door.

"Good night," he answered, and I left him standing there with Archie's accursed letter in his hand.

That is the story of how I came to this house in Adelphi Terrace. There is mystery in it, you must admit, my lady. Once or twice since that uncomfortable call I have passed the captain on the stairs; but the halls are very dark, and for that I am grateful. I hear him often above me; in fact, I hear him as I write this.

Who was Archie? What was the idea? I wonder.

Ah, well, I have my garden, and for that I am indebted to Archie the garru-

lous. It is nearly midnight now. The roar of London has died away to a fretful murmur, and somehow across this baking town a breeze has found its way. It whispers over the green grass, in the ivy that climbs my wall, in the soft murky folds of my curtains. Whispers—what?

Whispers, perhaps, the dreams that go with this, the first of my letters to you. They are dreams that even I dare not whisper yet.

And so—good night.

THE STRAWBERRY MAN.

CHAPTER III

WITH a smile that betrayed unusual interest, the daughter of the Texas statesman read that letter on Thursday morning in her room at the Carlton. There was no question about it—the first epistle from the strawberry-mad one had caught and held her attention. All day, as she dragged her father through picture galleries, she found herself looking forward to another morning, wondering, eager.

But on the following morning Sadie Haight, the maid through whom this odd correspondence was passing, had no letter to deliver. The news rather disappointed the daughter of Texas. At noon she in-

sisted on returning to the hotel for luncheon, though, as her father pointed out, they were far from the Carlton at the time. Her journey was rewarded. Letter number two was waiting; and as she read she gasped.

DEAR LADY AT THE CARLTON: I am writing this at three in the morning, with London silent as the grave, beyond our garden. That I am so late in getting to it is not because I did not think of you all day yesterday; not because I did not sit down at my desk at seven last evening to address you. Believe me, only the most startling, the most appalling accident could have held me up.

That most startling, most appalling accident has happened.

I am tempted to give you the news at

once in one striking and terrible sentence. And I could write that sentence. A tragedy, wrapped in mystery as impenetrable as a London fog, has befallen our quiet little house in Adelphi Terrace. In their basement room the Walters family, sleepless, overwhelmed, sit silent; on the dark stairs outside my door I hear at intervals the tramp of men on unhappy missions—

But no; I must go back to the very start of it all:

Last night I had an early dinner at Simpson's, in the Strand—so early that I was practically alone in the restaurant. The letter I was about to write to you was uppermost in my mind and, having quickly dined, I hurried back to my rooms. I remember clearly that, as I stood in the street before our house fumbling for my keys, Big Ben on the Parlia-

ment Buildings struck the hour of seven. The chime of the great bell rang out in our peaceful thoroughfare like a loud and friendly greeting.

Gaining my study, I sat down at once to write. Over my head I could hear Captain Fraser-Freer moving about—attiring himself, probably, for dinner. I was thinking, with an amused smile, how horrified he would be if he knew that the crude American below him had dined at the impossible hour of six, when suddenly I heard, in that room above me, some stranger talking in a harsh determined tone. Then came the captain's answering voice, calmer, more dignified. This conversation went along for some time, growing each moment more excited. Though I could not distinguish a word of it, I had the uncomfortable feeling that there was

a controversy on; and I remember feeling annoyed that any one should thus interfere with my composition of your letter, which I regarded as most important, you may be sure.

At the end of five minutes of argument there came the heavy thump-thump of men struggling above me. It recalled my college days, when we used to hear the fellows in the room above us throwing each other about in an excess of youth and high spirits. But this seemed more grim, more determined, and I did not like it. However, I reflected that it was none of my business. I tried to think about my letter.

The struggle ended with a particularly heavy thud that shook our ancient house to its foundations. I sat listening, somehow very much depressed. There was no

further sound. It was not entirely dark outside—the long twilight—and the frugal Walters had not lighted the hall lamps. Somebody was coming down the stairs very quietly—but their creaking betrayed him. I waited for him to pass through the shaft of light that poured from the door open at my back. At that moment Fate intervened in the shape of a breeze through my windows, the door banged shut, and a heavy man rushed by me in the darkness and ran down the stairs. I knew he was heavy, because the passageway was narrow and he had to push me aside to get by. I heard him swear beneath his breath.

Quickly I went to a hall window at the far end that looked out on the street. But the front door did not open; no one came out. I was puzzled for a second; then I

reentered my room and hurried to my balcony. I could make out the dim figure of a man running through the garden at the rear—that garden of which I have so often spoken. He did not try to open the gate; he climbed it, and so disappeared from sight into the alley.

For a moment I considered. These were odd actions, surely; but was it my place to interfere? I remembered the cold stare in the eyes of Captain Fraser-Freer when I presented that letter. I saw him standing motionless in his murky study, as amiable as a statue. Would he welcome an intrusion from me now?

Finally I made up my mind to forget these things and went down to find Walters. He and his wife were eating their dinner in the basement. I told him what had happened. He said he had let no

visitor in to see the captain, and was inclined to view my misgivings with a cold British eye. However, I persuaded him to go with me to the captain's rooms.

The captain's door was open. Remembering that in England the way of the intruder is hard, I ordered Walters to go first. He stepped into the room, where the gas flickered feebly in an aged chandelier.

"My God, sir!" said Walters, a servant even now.

And at last I write that sentence: Captain Fraser-Freer of the Indian Army lay dead on the floor, a smile that was almost a sneer on his handsome English face!

The horror of it is strong with me now as I sit in the silent morning in this room of mine which is so like the one in which the captain died. He had been stabbed

just over the heart, and my first thought was of that odd Indian knife which I had seen lying on his study table. I turned quickly to seek it, but it was gone. And as I looked at the table it came to me that here in this dusty room there must be finger prints—many finger prints.

The room was quite in order, despite those sounds of struggle. One or two odd matters met my eye. On the table stood a box from a florist in Bond Street. The lid had been removed and I saw that the box contained a number of white asters. Beside the box lay a scarf-pin—an emerald scarab. And not far from the captain's body lay what is known—owing to the German city where it is made—as a Homburg hat.

I recalled that it is most important at such times that nothing be disturbed, and

I turned to old Walters. His face was like this paper on which I write; his knees trembled beneath him.

"Walters," said I, "we must leave things just as they are until the police arrive. Come with me while I notify Scotland Yard."

"Very good, sir," said Walters.

We went down then to the telephone in the lower hall, and I called up the Yard. I was told that an inspector would come at once and I went back to my room to wait for him.

You can well imagine the feelings that were mine as I waited. Before this mystery should be solved, I foresaw that I might be involved to a degree that was unpleasant if not dangerous. Walters would remember that I first came here as one acquainted with the captain. He

had noted, I felt sure, the lack of intimacy between the captain and myself, once the former arrived from India. He would no doubt testify that I had been most anxious to obtain lodgings in the same house with Fraser-Freer. Then there was the matter of my letter from Archie. I must keep that secret, I felt sure. Lastly, there was not a living soul to back me up in my story of the quarrel that preceded the captain's death, of the man who escaped by way of the garden.

Alas, thought I, even the most stupid policeman can not fail to look upon me with the eye of suspicion!

In about twenty minutes three men arrived from Scotland Yard. By that time I had worked myself up into a state of absurd nervousness. I heard Walters let them in; heard them climb the stairs and

walk about in the room overhead. In a short time Walters knocked at my door and told me that Chief Inspector Bray desired to speak to me. As I preceded the servant up the stairs I felt toward him as an accused murderer must feel toward the witness who has it in his power to swear his life away.

He was a big active man—Bray; blond as are so many Englishmen. His every move spoke efficiency. Trying to act as unconcerned as an innocent man should—but failing miserably, I fear—I related to him my story of the voices, the struggle, and the heavy man who had got by me in the hall and later climbed our gate. He listened without comment. At the end he said:

"You were acquainted with the captain?"

"Slightly," I told him. Archie's letter kept popping into my mind, frightening me. "I had just met him—that is all; through a friend of his—Archibald Enwright was the name."

"Is Enwright in London to vouch for you?"

"I'm afraid not. I last heard of him in Interlaken."

"Yes? How did you happen to take rooms in this house?"

"The first time I called to see the captain he had not yet arrived from India. I was looking for lodgings and I took a great fancy to the garden here."

It sounded silly, put like that. I wasn't surprised that the inspector eyed me with scorn. But I rather wished he hadn't.

Bray began to walk about the room, ignoring me.

"White asters; scarab pin; Homburg hat," he detailed, pausing before the table where those strange exhibits lay.

A constable came forward carrying newspapers in his hand.

"What is it?" Bray asked.

"The *Daily Mail,* sir," said the constable. "The issues of July twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth and thirtieth."

Bray took the papers in his hand, glanced at them and tossed them contemptuously into a waste-basket. He turned to Walters.

"Have you notified the captain's family?" he asked.

"Sorry, sir," said Walters; "but I was so taken aback! Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. I'll go at once—"

"No," replied Bray sharply. "Never mind. I'll attend to it—"

There was a knock at the door. Bray called "Come!" and a slender boy, frail but with a military bearing, entered.

"Hello, Walters!" he said, smiling. "What's up? I—"

He stopped suddenly as his eyes fell upon the divan where Fraser-Freer lay. In an instant he was at the dead man's side.

"Stephen!" he cried in anguish.

"Who are you?" demanded the inspector—rather rudely, I thought.

"It's the captain's brother, sir," put in Walters. "Lieutenant Norman Fraser-Freer, of the Royal Fusiliers."

There fell a silence.

"A great calamity, sir—" began Walters to the boy.

I have rarely seen any one so overcome as young Fraser-Freer. Watching him, it seemed to me that the affection existing between him and the man on the divan must have been a beautiful thing. He turned away from his brother at last, and Walters sought to give him some idea of what had happened.

"You will pardon me, gentlemen," said the lieutenant. "This has been a terrible shock! I didn't dream, of course—I just dropped in for a word with—with him. And now—"

We said nothing. We let him apologize, as a true Englishman must, for his public display of emotion.

"I'm sorry," Bray remarked in a moment, his eyes still shifting about the room —"especially as England may soon have great need of men like the captain. Now,

gentlemen, I want to say this: I am the Chief of the Special Branch at the Yard. This is no ordinary murder. For reasons I can not disclose—and, I may add, for the best interests of the empire—news of the captain's tragic death must be kept for the present out of the newspapers. I mean, of course, the manner of his going. A mere death notice, you understand—the inference being that it was a natural taking off."

"I understand," said the lieutenant, as one who knows more than he tells.

"Thank you," said Bray. "I shall leave you to attend to the matter, as far as your family is concerned. You will take charge of the body. As for the rest of you, I forbid you to mention this matter outside."

And now Bray stood looking, with a puzzled air, at me.

"You are an American?" he said, and I judged he did not care for Americans.

"I am," I told him.

"Know any one at your consulate?" he demanded.

Thank heaven, I did! There is an under-secretary there named Watson—I went to college with him. I mentioned him to Bray.

"Very good," said the inspector. "You are free to go. But you must understand that you are an important witness in this case, and if you attempt to leave London you will be locked up."

So I came back to my rooms, horribly entangled in a mystery that is little to my liking. I have been sitting here in my study for some time, going over it again and again. There have been many footsteps on the stairs, many voices in the hall,

CHAPTER IV

IT IS hardly necessary to intimate that this letter came as something of a shock to the young woman who received it. For the rest of that day the many sights of London held little interest for her—so little, indeed, that her perspiring father began to see visions of his beloved Texas; and once hopefully suggested an early return home. The coolness with which this idea was received plainly showed him that he was on the wrong track; so he sighed and sought solace at the bar.

That night the two from Texas attended His Majesty's Theater, where

Bernard Shaw's latest play was being performed; and the witty Irishman would have been annoyed to see the scant attention one lovely young American in the audience gave his lines. The American in question retired at midnight, with eager thoughts turned toward the morning.

And she was not disappointed. When her maid, a stolid Englishwoman, appeared at her bedside early Saturday she carried a letter, which she handed over, with the turned-up nose of one who aids but does not approve. Quickly the girl tore it open.

DEAR TEXAS LADY: I am writing this late in the afternoon. The sun is casting long black shadows on the garden lawn, and the whole world is so bright and matter-of-fact I have to argue with myself to

be convinced that the events of that tragic night through which I passed really happened.

The newspapers this morning helped to make it all seem a dream; not a line—not a word, that I can find. When I think of America, and how by this time the reporters would be swarming through our house if this thing had happened over there, I am the more astonished. But then, I know these English papers. The great Joe Chamberlain died the other night at ten, and it was noon the next day when the first paper to carry the story appeared—screaming loudly that it had scored a beat. It had. Other lands, other methods.

It was probably not difficult for Bray to keep journalists such as these in the dark. So their great ungainly sheets

come out in total ignorance of a remarkable story in Adelphi Terrace. Famished for real news, they begin to hint at a huge war cloud on the horizon. Because tottering Austria has declared war on tiny Serbia, because the Kaiser is to-day hurrying, with his best dramatic effect, home to Berlin, they see all Europe shortly bathed in blood. A nightmare born of torrid days and tossing nights!

But it is of the affair in Adelphi Terrace that you no doubt want to hear. One sequel of the tragedy, which adds immeasurably to the mystery of it all, has occurred, and I alone am responsible for its discovery. But to go back:

I returned from mailing your letter at dawn this morning, very tired from the tension of the night. I went to bed, but could not sleep. More and more it was

preying on my mind that I was in a most unhappy position. I had not liked the looks cast at me by Inspector Bray, or his voice when he asked how I came to live in this house. I told myself I should not be safe until the real murderer of the poor captain was found; and so I began to puzzle over the few clues in the case—especially over the asters, the scarab pin and the Homburg hat.

It was then I remembered the four copies of the *Daily Mail* that Bray had casually thrown into the waste-basket as of no interest. I had glanced over his shoulder as he examined these papers, and had seen that each of them was folded so that our favorite department—the Agony Column—was uppermost. It happened I had in my desk copies of the *Mail* for the past week. You will understand why.

I rose, found those papers, and began to read. It was then that I made the astounding discovery to which I have alluded.

For a time after making it I was dumb with amazement, so that no course of action came readily to mind. In the end I decided that the thing for me to do was to wait for Bray's return in the morning and then point out to him the error he had made in ignoring the *Mail*.

Bray came in about eight o'clock and a few minutes later I heard another man ascend the stairs. I was shaving at the time, but I quickly completed the operation and, slipping on a bathrobe, hurried up to the captain's rooms. The younger brother had seen to the removal of the unfortunate man's body in the night, and, aside from Bray and the stranger who had

arrived almost simultaneously with him, there was no one but a sleepy-eyed constable there.

Bray's greeting was decidedly grouchy. The stranger, however—a tall bronzed man—made himself known to me in the most cordial manner. He told me he was Colonel Hughes, a close friend of the dead man; and that, unutterably shocked and grieved, he had come to inquire whether there was anything he might do.

"Inspector," said I, "last night in this room you held in your hand four copies of the *Daily Mail*. You tossed them into that basket as of no account. May I suggest that you rescue those copies, as I have a rather startling matter to make clear to you?" Too grand an official to stoop to a waste-basket, he nodded to the constable. The latter brought the papers; and, se-

lecting one from the lot, I spread it out on the table. "The issue of July twenty-seventh," I said.

I pointed to an item half-way down the column of Personal Notices. You yourself, my lady, may read it there if you happen to have saved a copy. It ran as follows:

"RANGOON: The asters are in full bloom in the garden at Canterbury. They are very beautiful—especially the white ones."

Bray grunted, and opened his little eyes. I took up the issue of the following day—the twenty-eighth:

"RANGOON: We have been forced to sell father's stick-pin—the emerald scarab he brought home from Cairo."

I had Bray's interest now. He leaned

heavily toward me, puffing. Greatly excited, I held before his eyes the issue of the twenty-ninth:

"RANGOON: Homburg hat gone forever—caught by a breeze—into the river."

"And finally," said I to the inspector, "the last message of all, in the issue of the thirtieth of July—on sale in the streets some twelve hours before Fraser-Freer was murdered. See!"

"RANGOON: To-night at ten. Regent Street.—Y. O. G."

Bray was silent.

"I take it you are aware, Inspector," I said, "that for the past two years Captain Fraser-Freer was stationed at Rangoon."

Still he said nothing; just looked at me with those foxy little eyes that I was coming to detest. At last he spoke sharply:

"Just how," he demanded, "did you happen to discover those messages? You were not in this room last night after I left?" He turned angrily to the constable. "I gave orders—"

"No," I put in; "I was not in this room. I happened to have on file in my rooms copies of the *Mail,* and by the merest chance—"

I saw that I had blundered. Undoubtedly my discovery of those messages was too pat. Once again suspicion looked my way.

"Thank you very much," said Bray. "I'll keep this in mind."

"Have you communicated with my friend at the consulate?" I asked.

"Yes. That's all. Good morning."

So I went.

I had been back in my room some

twenty minutes when there came a knock on the door, and Colonel Hughes entered. He was a genial man, in the early forties I should say, tanned by some sun not English, and gray at the temples.

"My dear sir," he said without preamble, "this is a most appalling business!"

"Decidedly," I answered. "Will you sit down?"

"Thank you." He sat and gazed frankly into my eyes. "Policemen," he added meaningly, "are a most suspicious tribe—often without reason. I am sorry you happen to be involved in this affair, for I may say that I fancy you to be exactly what you seem. May I add that, if you should ever need a friend, I am at your service?"

I was touched; I thanked him as best I could. His tone was so sympathetic and

kindly, and, above all, so sincere, that before I realized it I was telling him the whole story—of Archie and his letter; of my falling in love with a garden; of the startling discovery that the captain had never heard of his cousin; and of my subsequent unpleasant position. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"I suppose," he said, "that no man ever carries an unsealed letter of introduction without opening it to read just what praises have been lavished upon him. It is human nature—I have done it often. May I make so bold as to inquire—"

"Yes," said I. "It was unsealed and I did read it. Considering its purpose, it struck me as rather long. There were many warm words for me—words beyond all reason in view of my brief acquaintance with Enwright. I also recall that he

mentioned how long he had been in Interlaken, and that he said he expected to reach London about the first of August."

"The first of August," repeated the colonel. "That is to-morrow. Now—if you'll be so kind—just what happened last night?"

Again I ran over the events of that tragic evening—the quarrel; the heavy figure in the hall; the escape by way of the seldom-used gate.

"My boy," said Colonel Hughes as he rose to go, "the threads of this tragedy stretch far—some of them to India; some to a country I will not name. I may say frankly that I have other and greater interest in the matter than that of the captain's friend. For the present that is in strict confidence between us; the police are well-meaning, but they sometimes

blunder. Did I understand you to say that you have copies of the *Mail* containing those odd messages?"

"Right here in my desk," said I. I got them for him.

"I think I shall take them—if I may," he said. "You will, of course, not mention this little visit of mine. We shall meet again. Good morning."

And he went away, carrying those papers with their strange signals to Rangoon.

Somehow I feel wonderfully cheered by his call. For the first time since seven last evening I begin to breathe freely again.

And so, lady who likes mystery, the matter stands on the afternoon of the last day of July, nineteen hundred and fourteen.

I shall mail you this letter to-night. It is my third to you, and it carries with it three times the dreams that went with the first; for they are dreams that live not only at night, when the moon is on the courtyard, but also in the bright light of day.

Yes—I am remarkably cheered. I realize that I have not eaten at all—save a cup of coffee from the trembling hand of Walters—since last night, at Simpson's. I am going now to dine. I shall begin with grapefruit. I realize that I am suddenly very fond of grapefruit.

How bromidic to note it—we have many tastes in common!

EX-STRAWBERRY MAN.

The third letter from her correspondent of the Agony Column increased in the mind of the lovely young woman at the

Carlton the excitement and tension the second had created. For a long time, on the Saturday morning of its receipt, she sat in her room puzzling over the mystery of the house in Adelphi Terrace. When first she had heard that Captain Fraser-Freer, of the Indian Army, was dead of a knife wound over the heart, the news had shocked her like that of the loss of some old and dear friend. She had desired passionately the apprehension of his murderer, and had turned over and over in her mind the possibilities of white asters, a scarab pin and a Homburg hat.

Perhaps the girl longed for the arrest of the guilty man thus keenly because this jaunty young friend of hers—a friend whose name she did not know—to whom, indeed, she had never spoken—was so dangerously entangled in the affair. For,

from what she knew of Geoffrey West, from her casual glance in the restaurant and, far more, from his letters, she liked him extremely.

And now came his third letter, in which he related the connection of that hat, that pin and those asters with the column in the *Mail* which had first brought them together. As it happened, she, too, had copies of the paper for the first four days of the week. She went to her sitting-room, unearthed these copies, and—gasped! For from the column in Monday's paper stared up at her the cryptic words to Rangoon concerning asters in a garden at Canterbury. In the other three issues as well, she found the identical messages her strawberry man had quoted. She sat for a moment in deep thought; sat, in fact, until at her door came the en-

raged knocking of a hungry parent who had been waiting a full hour in the lobby below for her to join him at breakfast.

"Come, come!" boomed her father, entering at her invitation. "Don't sit here all day mooning. I'm hungry if you're not."

With quick apologies she made ready to accompany him down-stairs. Firmly, as she planned their campaign for the day, she resolved to put from her mind all thought of Adelphi Terrace. How well she succeeded may be judged from a speech made by her father that night just before dinner:

"Have you lost your tongue, Marian? You're as uncommunicative as a newly-elected office-holder. If you can't get a little more life into these expeditions of ours we'll pack up and head for home."

She smiled, patted his shoulder and promised to improve. But he appeared to be in a gloomy mood.

"I believe we ought to go, anyhow," he went on. "In my opinion this war is going to spread like a prairie fire. The Kaiser got back to Berlin yesterday. He'll sign the mobilization orders to-day as sure as fate. For the past week, on the Berlin Bourse, Canadian Pacific stock has been dropping. That means they expect England to come in."

He gazed darkly into the future. It may seem that, for an American statesman, he had an unusual grasp of European politics. This is easily explained by the fact that he had been talking with the bootblack at the Carlton Hotel.

"Yes," he said with sudden decision, "I'll go down to the steamship offices early Monday morning—"

CHAPTER V

HIS daughter heard these words with a sinking heart. She had a most unhappy picture of herself boarding a ship and sailing out of Liverpool or Southampton, leaving the mystery that so engrossed her thoughts forever unsolved. Wisely she diverted her father's thoughts toward the question of food. She had heard, she said, that Simpson's, in the Strand, was an excellent place to dine. They would go there, and walk. She suggested a short detour that would carry them through Adelphi Terrace. It seemed she had always wanted to see Adelphi Terrace.

As they passed through that silent street she sought to guess, from an inspection of the grim forbidding house fronts, back of which lay the lovely garden, the romantic mystery. But the houses were so very much like one another. Before one of them, she noted, a taxi waited.

After dinner her father pleaded for a music-hall as against what he called "some highfaluting, teacup English play." He won. Late that night, as they rode back to the Carlton, special editions were being proclaimed in the streets. Germany was mobilizing!

The girl from Texas retired, wondering what epistolary surprise the morning would bring forth. It brought forth this:

DEAR DAUGHTER OF THE SENATE: Or is it Congress? I could not quite decide. But surely in one or the other of those

august bodies your father sits when he is not at home in Texas or viewing Europe through his daughter's eyes. One look at him and I had gathered that.

But Washington is far from London, isn't it? And it is London that interests us most—though father's constituents must not know that. It is really a wonderful, an astounding city, once you have got the feel of the tourist out of your soul. I have been reading the most enthralling essays on it, written by a newspaper man who first fell desperately in love with it at seven—an age when the whole glittering town was symbolized for him by the fried-fish shop at the corner of the High Street. With him I have been going through its gray and furtive thoroughfares in the dead of night, and sometimes we have kicked an ash-barrel and some-

times a romance. Some day I might show that London to you—guarding you, of course, from the ash-barrels, if you are that kind. On second thoughts, you aren't.

But I know that it is of Adelphi Terrace and a late captain in the Indian Army that you want to hear now. Yesterday, after my discovery of those messages in the *Mail* and the call of Captain Hughes, passed without incident. Last night I mailed you my third letter, and after wandering for a time amid the alternate glare and gloom of the city, I went back to my rooms and smoked on my balcony while about me the inmates of six million homes sweltered in the heat.

Nothing happened. I felt a bit disappointed, a bit cheated, as one might feel on the first night spent at home after many successive visits to exciting plays. To-

day, the first of August dawned, and still all was quiet. Indeed, it was not until this evening that further developments in the sudden death of Captain Fraser-Freer arrived to disturb me. These developments are strange ones surely, and I shall hasten to relate them.

I dined to-night at a little place in Soho. My waiter was Italian, and on him I amused myself with the Italian in Ten Lessons of which I am foolishly proud. We talked of Fiesole, where he had lived. Once I rode from Fiesole down the hill to Florence in the moonlight. I remember endless walls on which hung roses, fresh and blooming. I remember a gaunt nunnery and two-gray-robed sisters clanging shut the gates. I remember the searchlight from the military encampment, playing constantly over the Arno

and the roofs—the eye of Mars that, here in Europe, never closes. And always the flowers nodding above me, stooping now and then to brush my face. I came to think that at the end Paradise, and not a second-rate hotel, was waiting. One may still take that ride, I fancy. Some day—some day—

I dined in Soho. I came back to Adelphi Terrace in the hot, reeking August dusk, reflecting that the mystery in which I was involved was, after a fashion, standing still. In front of our house I noticed a taxi waiting. I thought nothing of it as I entered the murky hallway and climbed the familiar stairs.

My door stood open. It was dark in my study, save for the reflection of the lights of London outside. As I crossed

the threshold there came to my nostrils the faint sweet perfume of lilacs. There are no lilacs in our garden, and if there were it is not the season. No, this perfume had been brought there by a woman —a woman who sat at my desk and raised her head as I entered.

"You will pardon this intrusion," she said in the correct careful English of one who has learned the speech from a book. "I have come for a brief word with you—then I shall go."

I could think of nothing to say. I stood gaping like a schoolboy.

"My word," the woman went on, "is in the nature of advice. We do not always like those who give us advice. None the less, I trust that you will listen."

I found my tongue then.

"I am listening," I said stupidly. "But first—a light—" And I moved toward the matches on the mantelpiece.

Quickly the woman rose and faced me. I saw then that she wore a veil—not a heavy veil, but a fluffy, attractive thing that was yet sufficient to screen her features from me.

"I beg of you," she cried, "no light!" And as I paused, undecided, she added, in a tone which suggested lips that pout: "It is such a little thing to ask—surely you will not refuse."

I suppose I should have insisted. But her voice was charming, her manner perfect, and that odor of lilacs reminiscent of a garden I knew long ago, at home.

"Very well," said I.

"Oh—I am grateful to you," she answered. Her tone changed. "I under-

stand that, shortly after seven o'clock last Thursday evening, you heard in the room above you the sounds of a struggle. Such has been your testimony to the police?"

"It has," said I.

"Are you quite certain as to the hour?" I felt that she was smiling at me. "Might it not have been later—or earlier?"

"I am sure it was just after seven," I replied. "I'll tell you why: I had just returned from dinner and while I was unlocking the door Big Ben on the House of Parliament struck—"

She raised her hand.

"No matter," she said, and there was a touch of iron in her voice. "You are no longer sure of that. Thinking it over, you have come to the conclusion that it may have been barely six-thirty when you heard the noise of a struggle."

"Indeed?" said I. I tried to sound sarcastic, but I was really too astonished by her tone.

"Yes—indeed!" she replied. "That is what you will tell Inspector Bray when next you see him. 'It may have been six-thirty,' you will tell him. 'I have thought it over and I am not certain.'"

"Even for a very charming lady," I said, "I can not misrepresent the facts in a matter so important. It was after seven—"

"I am not asking you to do a favor for a lady," she replied. "I am asking you to do a favor for yourself. If you refuse the consequences may be most unpleasant."

"I'm rather at a loss—" I began.

She was silent for a moment. Then she turned and I felt her looking at me through the veil.

"Who was Archibald Enwright?" she demanded. My heart sank. I recognized the weapon in her hands. "The police," she went on, "do not yet know that the letter of introduction you brought to the captain was signed by a man who addressed Fraser-Freer as Dear Cousin, but who is completely unknown to the family. Once that information reaches Scotland Yard, your chance of escaping arrest is slim.

"They may not be able to fasten this crime upon you, but there will be complications most distasteful. One's liberty is well worth keeping—and then, too, before the case ends, there will be wide publicity—"

"Well?" said I.

"That is why you are going to suffer a lapse of memory in the matter of the hour

at which you heard that struggle. As you think it over, it is going to occur to you that it may have been six-thirty, not seven. Otherwise—"

"Go on."

"Otherwise the letter of introduction you gave to the captain will be sent anonymously to Inspector Bray."

"You have that letter!" I cried.

"Not I," she answered. "But it will be sent to Bray. It will be pointed out to him that you were posing under false colors. You could not escape!"

I was most uncomfortable. The net of suspicion seemed closing in about me. But I was resentful, too, of the confidence in this woman's voice.

"None the less," said I, "I refuse to change my testimony. The truth is the truth—"

The woman had moved to the door. She turned.

"To-morrow," she replied, "it is not unlikely you will see Inspector Bray. As I said, I came here to give you advice. You had better take it. What does it matter—a half-hour this way or that? And the difference is prison for you. Good night."

She was gone. I followed into the hall. Below, in the street, I heard the rattle of her taxi.

I went back into my room and sat down. I was upset, and no mistake. Outside my windows the continuous symphony of the city played on—the busses, the trams, the never-silent voices. I gazed out. What a tremendous acreage of dank brick houses and dank British souls! I felt horribly alone. I may add that I felt a bit

frightened, as though that great city were slowly closing in on me.

Who was this woman of mystery? What place had she held in the life—and perhaps in the death—of Captain Fraser-Freer? Why should she come boldly to my rooms to make her impossible demand?

I resolved that, even at the risk of my own comfort, I would stick to the truth. And to that resolve I would have clung had I not shortly received another visit—this one far more inexplicable, far more surprising, than the first.

It was about nine o'clock when Walters tapped at my door and told me two gentlemen wished to see me. A moment later into my study walked Lieutenant Norman Fraser-Freer and a fine old gentleman with a face that suggested some

faded portrait hanging on an aristocrat's wall. I had never seen him before.

"I hope it is quite convenient for you to see us," said young Fraser-Freer.

I assured him that it was. The boy's face was drawn and haggard; there was terrible suffering in his eyes, yet about him hung, like a halo, the glory of a great resolution.

"May I present my father?" he said. "General Fraser-Freer, retired. We have come on a matter of supreme importance—"

The old man muttered something I could not catch. I could see that he had been hard hit by the loss of his elder son. I asked them to be seated; the general complied, but the boy walked the floor in a manner most distressing.

"I shall not be long," he remarked.

"Nor at a time like this is one in the mood to be diplomatic. I will only say, sir, that we have come to ask of you a great—a very great favor indeed. You may not see fit to grant it. If that is the case we can not well reproach you. But if you can—"

"It is a great favor, sir!" broke in the general. "And I am in the odd position where I do not know whether you will serve me best by granting it or by refusing to do so."

"Father—please—if you don't mind—" The boy's voice was kindly but determined. He turned to me.

"Sir—you have testified to the police that it was a bit past seven when you heard in the room above the sounds of the struggle which—which— You understand."

In view of the mission of the caller

who had departed a scant hour previously, the boy's question startled me.

"Such was my testimony," I answered. "It was the truth."

"Naturally," said Lieutenant Fraser-Freer. "But—er—as a matter of fact, we are here to ask that you alter your testimony. Could you, as a favor to us who have suffered so cruel a loss—a favor we should never forget—could you not make the hour of that struggle half after six?"

I was quite overwhelmed.

"Your—reasons?" I managed at last to ask.

"I am not able to give them to you in full," the boy answered. "I can only say this: It happens that at seven o'clock last Thursday night I was dining with friends at the Savoy—friends who would not be likely to forget the occasion."

The old general leaped to his feet.

"Norman," he cried, "I can not let you do this thing! I simply will not—"

"Hush, father," said the boy wearily. "We have threshed it all out. You have promised—"

The old man sank back into the chair and buried his face in his hands.

"If you are willing to change your testimony," young Fraser-Freer went on to me, "I shall at once confess to the police that it was I who—who murdered my brother. They suspect me. They know that late last Thursday afternoon I purchased a revolver, for which, they believe, at the last moment I substituted the knife. They know that I was in debt to him; that we had quarreled about money matters; that by his death I, and I alone, could profit."

He broke off suddenly and came toward me, holding out his arms with a pleading gesture I can never forget.

"Do this for me!" he cried. "Let me confess! Let me end this whole horrible business here and now."

Surely no man had ever to answer such an appeal before.

"Why?" I found myself saying, and over and over I repeated it—"Why? Why?"

The lieutenant faced me, and I hope never again to see such a look in a man's eyes.

"I loved him!" he cried. "That is why. For his honor, for the honor of our family, I am making this request of you. Believe me, it is not easy. I can tell you no more than that. You knew my brother?"

"Slightly."

"Then, for his sake—do this thing I ask."

"But—murder—"

"You heard the sounds of a struggle. I shall say that we quarreled—that I struck in self-defense." He turned to his father. "It will mean only a few years in prison—I can bear that!" he cried. "For the honor of our name!"

The old man groaned, but did not raise his head. The boy walked back and forth over my faded carpet like a lion caged. I stood wondering what answer I should make.

"I know what you are thinking," said the lieutenant. "You can not credit your ears. But you have heard correctly. And now—as you might put it—it is up to you. I have been in your country." He

A Warner Bros. Talking Picture. *The Actors Chosen Photoplay Title The Second Floor Mystery.*

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER KILLS CAPTAIN FRASER WITH THE STRANGE KNIFE

smiled pitifully. "I think I know you Americans. You are not the sort to refuse a man when he is sore beset—as I am."

I looked from him to the general and back again.

"I must think this over," I answered, my mind going at once to Colonel Hughes. "Later—say to-morrow—you shall have my decision."

"To-morrow," said the boy, "we shall both be called before Inspector Bray. I shall know your answer then—and I hope with all my heart it will be yes."

There were a few mumbled words of farewell and he and the broken old man went out. As soon as the street door closed behind them I hurried to the telephone and called a number Colonel Hughes had given me. It was with a

feeling of relief that I heard his voice come back over the wire. I told him I must see him at once. He replied that by a singular chance he had been on the point of starting for my rooms.

In the half-hour that elapsed before the coming of the colonel I walked about like a man in a trance. He was barely inside my door when I began pouring out to him the story of those two remarkable visits. He made little comment on the woman's call beyond asking me whether I could describe her; and he smiled when I mentioned lilac perfume. At mention of young Fraser-Freer's preposterous request he whistled.

"By gad!" he said. "Interesting—most interesting! I am not surprised, however. That boy has the stuff in him."

"But what shall I do?" I demanded.

Colonel Hughes smiled.

"It makes little difference what you do," he said. "Norman Fraser-Freer did not kill his brother, and that will be proved in due time." He considered for a moment. "Bray no doubt would be glad to have you alter your testimony, since he is trying to fasten the crime on the young lieutenant. On the whole, if I were you, I think that when the opportunity comes to-morrow I should humor the inspector."

"You mean—tell him I am no longer certain as to the hour of that struggle?"

"Precisely. I give you my word that young Fraser-Freer will not be permanently incriminated by such an act on your part. And incidentally you will be aiding me."

"Very well," said I. "But I don't understand this at all."

"No—of course not. I wish I could explain to you; but I can not. I will say this—the death of Captain Fraser-Freer is regarded as a most significant thing by the War Office. Thus it happens that two distinct hunts for his assassin are under way—one conducted by Bray, the other by me. Bray does not suspect that I am working on the case and I want to keep him in the dark as long as possible. You may choose which of these investigations you wish to be identified with."

"I think," said I, "that I prefer you to Bray."

"Good boy!" he answered. "You have not gone wrong. And you can do me a service this evening, which is why I was

on the point of coming here, even before you telephoned me. I take it that you remember and could identify the chap who called himself Archibald Enwright —the man who gave you that letter to the captain?"

"I surely could," said I.

"Then, if you can spare me an hour, get your hat."

And so it happens, lady of the Carlton, that I have just been to Limehouse. You do not know where Limehouse is and I trust you never will. It is picturesque; it is revolting; it is colorful and wicked. The weird odors of it still fill my nostrils; the sinister portrait of it is still before my eyes. It is the Chinatown of London —Limehouse. Down in the dregs of the town—with West India Dock Road for its spinal column—it lies, redolent of

ways that are dark and tricks that are vain. Not only the heathen Chinee so peculiar shuffles through its dim-lit alleys, but the scum of the earth, of many colors and of many climes. The Arab and the Hindu, the Malayan and the Jap, black men from the Congo and fair men from Scandinavia—these you may meet there—the outpourings of all the ships that sail the Seven Seas. There many drunken beasts, with their pay in their pockets, seek each his favorite sin; and for those who love most the opium, there is, at all too regular intervals, the Sign of the Open Lamp.

We went there, Colonel Hughes and I. Up and down the narrow Causeway, yellow at intervals with the light from gloomy shops, dark mostly because of tightly closed shutters through which

only thin jets found their way, we walked until we came and stood at last in shadow outside the black doorway of Harry San Li's so-called restaurant. We waited ten, fifteen minutes; then a man came down the Causeway and paused before that door. There was something familiar in his jaunty walk. Then the faint glow of the lamp that was the indication of Harry San's real business lit his pale face, and I knew that I had seen him last in the cool evening at Interlaken, where Limehouse could not have lived a moment, with the Jungfrau frowning down upon it.

"Enwright?" whispered Hughes.

"Not a doubt of it!" said I.

"Good!" he replied with fervor.

And now another man shuffled down the street and stood suddenly straight and waiting before the colonel.

"Stay with him," said Hughes softly. "Don't let him get out of your sight."

"Very good, sir," said the man; and, saluting, he passed on up the stairs and whistled softly at that black depressing door.

The clock above the Millwall Docks was striking eleven as the colonel and I caught a bus that should carry us back to a brighter, happier London. Hughes spoke but seldom on that ride; and, repeating his advice that I humor Inspector Bray on the morrow, he left me in the Strand.

So, my lady, here I sit in my study, waiting for that most important day that is shortly to dawn. A full evening, you must admit. A woman with the perfume of lilacs about her has threatened that unless I lie I shall encounter consequences

most unpleasant. A handsome young lieutenant has begged me to tell that same lie for the honor of his family, and thus condemn him to certain arrest and imprisonment. And I have been down into hell to-night and seen Archibald Enwright, of Interlaken, conniving with the devil.

I presume I should go to bed; but I know I can not sleep. To-morrow is to be, beyond all question, a red-letter day in the matter of the captain's murder. And once again, against my will, I am down to play a leading part.

The symphony of this great, gray, sad city is a mere hum in the distance now, for it is nearly midnight. I shall mail this letter to you—post it, I should say, since I am in London—and then I shall wait in my dim rooms for the dawn. And

as I wait I shall be thinking not always of the captain, or his brother, or of Hughes, or Limehouse and Enwright, but often—oh, very often—of you.

In my last letter I scoffed at the idea of a great war. But when we came back from Limehouse to-night the papers told us that the Kaiser had signed the order to mobilize. Austria in; Serbia in; Germany, Russia and France in. Hughes tells me that England is shortly to follow, and I suppose there is no doubt of it. It is a frightful thing—this future that looms before us; and I pray that for you at least it may hold only happiness.

For, my lady, when I write good night, I speak it aloud as I write; and there is in my voice more than I dare tell you of now.

THE AGONY COLUMN MAN.

Not unwelcome to the violet eyes of the girl from Texas were the last words of this letter, read in her room that Sunday morning. But the lines predicting England's early entrance into the war recalled to her mind a most undesirable contingency. On the previous night, when the war extras came out confirming the forecast of his favorite bootblack, her usually calm father had shown signs of panic. He was not a man slow to act. And she knew that, putty though he was in her hands in matters which he did not regard as important, he could also be firm where he thought firmness necessary. America looked even better to him than usual, and he had made up his mind to go there immediately. There was no use in arguing with him.

At this point came a knock at her door

and her father entered. One look at his face—red, perspiring and decidedly unhappy—served to cheer his daughter.

"Been down to the steamship offices," he panted, mopping his bald head. "They're open to-day, just like it was a week day—but they might as well be closed. There's nothing doing. Every boat's booked up to the rails; we can't get out of here for two weeks—maybe more."

"I'm sorry," said his daughter.

"No, you ain't! You're delighted! You think it's romantic to get caught like this. Wish I had the enthusiasm of youth." He fanned himself with a newspaper. "Lucky I went over to the express office yesterday and loaded up on gold. I reckon when the blow falls it'll be tolerable hard to cash checks in this man's town."

"That was a good idea."

"Ready for breakfast?" he inquired.

"Quite ready," she smiled.

They went below, she humming a song from a revue, while he glared at her. She was very glad they were to be in London a little longer. She felt she could not go, with that mystery still unsolved.

CHAPTER VI

THE last peace Sunday London was to know in many weary months went by, a tense and anxious day. Early on Monday the fifth letter from the young man of the Agony Column arrived, and when the girl from Texas read it she knew that under no circumstances could she leave London now. It ran:

DEAR LADY FROM HOME: I call you that because the word home has for me, this hot afternoon in London, about the sweetest sound word ever had. I can see, when I close my eyes, Broadway at midday; Fifth Avenue, gay and colorful, even with all the best people away;

Washington Square, cool under the trees, lovely and desirable despite the presence everywhere of alien neighbors from the district to the South. I long for home with an ardent longing; never was London so cruel, so hopeless, so drab, in my eyes. For, as I write this, a constable sits at my elbow, and he and I are shortly to start for Scotland Yard. I have been arrested as a suspect in the case of Captain Fraser-Freer's murder!

I predicted last night that this was to be a red-letter day in the history of that case, and I also saw myself an unwilling actor in the drama. But little did I suspect the series of astonishing events that was to come with the morning; little did I dream that the net I have been dreading would to-day engulf me. I can scarcely blame Inspector Bray for holding me;

what I can not understand is why Colonel Hughes—

But you want, of course, the whole story from the beginning; and I shall give it to you. At eleven o'clock this morning a constable called on me at my rooms and informed me that I was wanted at once by the Chief Inspector at the Yard.

We climbed—the constable and I—a narrow stone stairway somewhere at the back of New Scotland Yard, and so came to the inspector's room. Bray was waiting for us, smiling and confident. I remember—silly as the detail is—that he wore in his buttonhole a white rose. His manner of greeting me was more genial than usual. He began by informing me that the police had apprehended the man who, they believed, was guilty of the captain's murder.

"There is one detail to be cleared up," he said. "You told me the other night that it was shortly after seven o'clock when you heard the sounds of struggle in the room above you. You were somewhat excited at the time, and under similar circumstances men have been known to make mistakes. Have you considered the matter since? Is it not possible that you were in error in regard to the hour?"

I recalled Hughes' advice to humor the inspector; and I said that, having thought it over, I was not quite sure. It might have been earlier than seven—say six-thirty.

"Exactly," said Bray. He seemed rather pleased. "The natural stress of the moment—I understand. Wilkinson, bring in your prisoner."

The constable addressed turned and

left the room, coming back a moment later with Lieutenant Norman Fraser-Freer. The boy was pale; I could see at a glance that he had not slept for several nights.

"Lieutenant," said Bray very sharply, "will you tell me—is it true that your brother, the late captain, had loaned you a large sum of money a year or so ago?"

"Quite true," answered the lieutenant in a low voice.

"You and he had quarreled about the amount of money you spent?"

"Yes."

"By his death you became the sole heir of your father, the general. Your position with the money-lenders was quite altered. Am I right?"

"I fancy so."

"Last Thursday afternoon you went to

the Army and Navy Stores and purchased a revolver. You already had your service weapon, but to shoot a man with a bullet from that would be to make the hunt of the police for the murderer absurdly simple."

The boy made no answer.

"Let us suppose," Bray went on, "that last Thursday evening at half after six you called on your brother in his rooms at Adelphi Terrace. There was an argument about money. You became enraged. You saw him and him alone between you and the fortune you needed so badly. Then—I am only supposing—you noticed on his table an odd knife he had brought from India—safer—more silent—than a gun. You seized it—"

"Why suppose?" the boy broke in. "I'm not trying to conceal anything.

You're right—I did it! I killed my brother! Now let us get the whole business over as soon as may be."

Into the face of Inspector Bray there came at that moment a look that has been puzzling me ever since—a look that has recurred to my mind again and again, even in the stress and storm of this eventful day. It was only too evident that this confession came to him as a shock. I presume so easy a victory seemed hollow to him; he was wishing the boy had put up a fight. Policemen are probably like that.

"My boy," he said, "I am sorry for you. My course is clear. If you will go with one of my men—"

It was at this point that the door of the inspector's room opened and Colonel Hughes, cool and smiling, walked in. Bray chuckled at sight of the military man.

"Ah, Colonel," he cried, "you make a good entrance! This morning, when I discovered that I had the honor of having you associated with me in the search for the captain's murderer, you were foolish enough to make a little wager—"

"I remember," Hughes answered. "A scarab pin against—a Homburg hat."

"Precisely," said Bray. "You wagered that you, and not I, would discover the guilty man. Well, Colonel, you owe me a scarab. Lieutenant Norman Fraser-Freer has just told me that he killed his brother, and I was on the point of taking down his full confession."

"Indeed!" replied Hughes calmly. "Interesting—most interesting! But before we consider the wager lost—before you force the lieutenant to confess in full—I should like the floor."

"Certainly," smiled Bray.

"When you were kind enough to let me have two of your men this morning," said Hughes, "I told you I contemplated the arrest of a lady. I have brought that lady to Scotland Yard with me." He stepped to the door, opened it and beckoned. A tall, blonde handsome woman of about thirty-five entered; and instantly to my nostrils came the pronounced odor of lilacs. "Allow me, Inspector," went on the colonel, "to introduce to you the Countess Sophie de Graf, late of Berlin, late of Delhi and Rangoon, now of 17 Leitrim Grove, Battersea Park Road."

The woman faced Bray; and there was a terrified, hunted look in her eyes.

"You are the inspector?" she asked.

"I am," said Bray.

"And a man—I can see that," she went

on, her eyes flashing angrily at Hughes. "I appeal to you to protect me from the brutal questioning of this—this fiend."

"You are hardly complimentary, Countess," Hughes smiled. "But I am willing to forgive you if you will tell the inspector the story that you have recently related to me."

The woman shut her lips tightly and for a long moment gazed into the eyes of Inspector Bray.

"He"—she said at last, nodding in the direction of Colonel Hughes—"he got it out of me—how, I don't know."

"Got what out of you?" Bray's little eyes were blinking.

"At six-thirty o'clock last Thursday evening," said the woman, "I went to the rooms of Captain Fraser-Freer, in Adelphi Terrace. An argument arose. I

seized from his table an Indian dagger that was lying there—I stabbed him just above the heart!"

In that room in Scotland Yard a tense silence fell. For the first time we were all conscious of a tiny clock on the inspector's desk, for it ticked now with a loudness sudden and startling. I gazed at the faces about me. Bray's showed a momentary surprise—then the mask fell again. Lieutenant Fraser-Freer was plainly amazed. On the face of Colonel Hughes I saw what struck me as an open sneer.

"Go on, Countess," he smiled.

She shrugged her shoulders and turned toward him a disdainful back. Her eyes were all for Bray.

"It's very brief, the story," she said hastily—I thought almost apologetically. "I

had known the captain in Rangoon. My husband was in business there—an exporter of rice—and Captain Fraser-Freer came often to our house. We—he was a charming man, the captain—"

"Go on!" ordered Hughes.

"We fell desperately in love," said the countess. "When he returned to England, though supposedly on a furlough, he told me he would never return to Rangoon. He expected a transfer to Egypt. So it was arranged that I should desert my husband and follow on the next boat. I did so—believing in the captain—thinking he really cared for me—I gave up everything for him. And then—"

Her voice broke and she took out a handkerchief. Again that odor of lilacs in the room.

"For a time I saw the captain often in

London; and then I began to notice a change. Back among his own kind, with the lonely days in India a mere memory —he seemed no longer to—to care for me. Then—last Thursday morning—he called on me to tell me that he was through; that he would never see me again—in fact, that he was to marry a girl of his own people who had been waiting—"

The woman looked piteously about at us.

"I was desperate," she pleaded. "I had given up all that life held for me—given it up for a man who now looked at me coldly and spoke of marrying another. Can you wonder that I went in the evening to his rooms—went to plead with him—to beg, almost on my knees? It

was no use. He was done with me—he said that over and over. Overwhelmed with blind rage and despair, I snatched up that knife from the table and plunged it into his heart. At once I was filled with remorse. I—"

"One moment," broke in Hughes. "You may keep the details of your subsequent actions until later. I should like to compliment you, Countess. You tell it better each time."

He came over and faced Bray. I thought there was a distinct note of hostility in his voice.

"Checkmate, Inspector!" he said.

Bray made no reply. He sat there staring up at the colonel, his face turned to stone.

"The scarab pin," went on Hughes, "is

not yet forthcoming. We are tied for honors, my friend. You have your confession, but I have one to match it."

"All this is beyond me," snapped Bray.

"A bit beyond me, too," the colonel answered. "Here are two people who wish us to believe that on the evening of Thursday last, at half after six of the clock, each sought out Captain Fraser-Freer in his rooms and murdered him."

He walked to the window and then wheeled dramatically.

"The strangest part of it all is," he added, "that at six-thirty o'clock last Thursday evening, at an obscure restaurant in Soho—Frigacci's—these two people were having tea together!"

I must admit that, as the colonel calmly offered this information, I suddenly went limp all over at a realization of the end-

less maze of mystery in which we were involved. The woman gave a little cry, and Lieutenant Fraser-Freer leaped to his feet.

"How the devil do you know that?" he cried.

"I know it," said Colonel Hughes, "because one of my men happened to be having tea at a table near by. He happened to be having tea there for the reason that ever since the arrival of this lady in London, at the request of—er—friends in India, I have been keeping track of her every move; just as I kept watch over your late brother, the captain."

Without a word Lieutenant Fraser-Freer dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"I'm sorry, my son," said Hughes. "Really, I am. You made a heroic effort

to keep the facts from coming out—a man's-size effort it was. But the War Office knew long before you did that your brother had succumbed to this woman's lure—that he was serving her and Berlin, and not his own country, England."

Fraser-Freer raised his head. When he spoke there was in his voice an emotion vastly more sincere than that which had moved him when he made his absurd confession.

"The game's up," he said. "I have done all I could. This will kill my father, I am afraid. Ours has been an honorable name, Colonel; you know that—a long line of military men whose loyalty to their country has never before been in question. I thought my confession would end the whole nasty business, that the investigations would stop, and that I might

be able to keep forever unknown this horrible thing about him—about my brother."

Colonel Hughes laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and the latter went on:

"They reached me—those frightful insinuations about Stephen—in a roundabout way; and when he came home from India I resolved to watch him. I saw him go often to the house of this woman. I satisfied myself that she was the same one involved in the stories coming from Rangoon; then, under another name, I managed to meet her. I hinted to her that I myself was none too loyal; not completely, but to a limited extent, I won her confidence. Gradually I became convinced that my brother was indeed disloyal to his country, to his name, to us all. It was at that tea time you have men-

tioned when I finally made up my mind. I had already bought a revolver; and, with it in my pocket, I went to the Savoy for dinner."

He rose and paced the floor.

"I left the Savoy early and went to Stephen's rooms. I was resolved to have it out with him, to put the matter to him bluntly; and if he had no explanation to give me I intended to kill him then and there. So, you see, I was guilty in intention if not in reality. I entered his study. It was filled with strangers. On his sofa I saw my brother Stephen lying—stabbed above the heart—dead!" There was a moment's silence. "That is all," said Lieutenant Fraser-Freer.

"I take it," said Hughes kindly, "that we have finished with the lieutenant. Eh, Inspector?"

"Yes," said Bray shortly. "You may go."

"Thank you," the boy answered. As he went out he said brokenly to Hughes: "I must find him—my father."

Bray sat in his chair, staring hard ahead, his jaw thrust out angrily. Suddenly he turned on Hughes.

"You don't play fair," he said. "I wasn't told anything of the status of the captain at the War Office. This is all news to me."

"Very well," smiled Hughes. "The bet is off if you like."

"No, by heaven!" Bray cried. "It's still on, and I'll win it yet. A fine morning's work I suppose you think you've done. But are we any nearer to finding the murderer? Tell me that."

"Only a bit nearer, at any rate," re-

plied Hughes suavely. "This lady, of course, remains in custody."

"Yes, yes," answered the inspector. "Take her away!" he ordered.

A constable came forward for the countess and Colonel Hughes gallantly held open the door.

"You will have an opportunity, Sophie," he said, "to think up another story. You are clever—it will not be hard."

She gave him a black look and went out. Bray got up from his desk. He and Colonel Hughes stood facing each other across a table, and to me there was something in the manner of each that suggested eternal conflict.

"Well?" sneered Bray.

"There is one possibility we have overlooked," Hughes answered. He turned toward me and I was startled by the cold-

ness in his eyes. "Do you know, Inspector," he went on, "that this American came to London with a letter of introduction to the captain—a letter from the captain's cousin, one Archibald Enwright? And do you know that Fraser-Freer had no cousin of that name?"

"No!" said Bray.

"It happens to be the truth," said Hughes. "The American has confessed as much to me."

"Then," said Bray to me, and his little blinking eyes were on me with a narrow calculating glance that sent the shivers up and down my spine, "you are under arrest. I have exempted you so far because of your friend at the United States Consulate. That exemption ends now."

I was thunderstruck. I turned to the colonel, the man who had suggested that

I seek him out if I needed a friend—the man I had looked to to save me from just such a contingency as this. But his eyes were quite fishy and unsympathetic.

"Quite correct, Inspector," he said. "Lock him up!" And as I began to protest he passed very close to me and spoke in a low voice: "Say nothing. Wait!"

I pleaded to be allowed to go back to my rooms, to communicate with my friends, and pay a visit to our consulate and to the Embassy; and at the colonel's suggestion Bray agreed to this somewhat irregular course. So this afternoon I have been abroad with a constable, and while I wrote this long letter to you he has been fidgeting in my easy chair. Now he informs me that his patience is exhausted and that I must go at once.

So there is no time to wonder; no time

to speculate as to the future, as to the colonel's sudden turn against me or the promise of his whisper in my ear. I shall, no doubt, spend the night behind those hideous, forbidding walls that your guide has pointed out to you as New Scotland Yard. And when I shall write again, when I shall end this series of letters so filled with—

The constable will not wait. He is as impatient as a child. Surely he is lying when he says I have kept him here an hour.

Wherever I am, dear lady, whatever be the end of this amazing tangle, you may be sure the thought of you—

Confound the man!

YOURS, IN DURANCE VILE.

This fifth letter from the young man of the Agony Column arrived at the Carlton

Hotel, as the reader may recall, on Monday morning, August the third. And it represented to the girl from Texas the climax of the excitement she had experienced in the matter of the murder in Adelphi Terrace. The news that her pleasant young friend—whom she did not know—had been arrested as a suspect in the case, inevitable as it had seemed for days, came none the less as an unhappy shock. She wondered whether there was anything she could do to help. She even considered going to Scotland Yard and, on the ground that her father was a Congressman from Texas, demanding the immediate release of her strawberry man. Sensibly, however, she decided that Congressmen from Texas meant little in the life of the London police. Besides, she might have difficulty in explaining to that

same Congressman how she happened to know all about a crime that was as yet unmentioned in the newspapers.

So she reread the latter portion of the fifth letter, which pictured her hero marched off ingloriously to Scotland Yard and with a worried little sigh, went below to join her father.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE course of the morning she made several mysterious inquiries of her parent regarding nice points of international law as it concerned murder, and it is probable that he would have been struck by the odd nature of these questions had he not been unduly excited about another matter.

"I tell you, we've got to get home!" he announced gloomily. "The German troops are ready at Aix-la-Chapelle for an assault on Liège. Yes, sir—they're going to strike through Belgium! Know what that means? England in the war! Labor troubles; suffragette troubles; civil war in Ireland—these things will melt

away as quickly as that snow we had last winter in Texas. They'll go in. It would be national suicide if they didn't."

His daughter stared at him. She was unaware that it was the bootblack at the Carlton he was now quoting. She began to think he knew more about foreign affairs than she had given him credit for.

"Yes, sir," he went on; "we've got to travel—fast. This won't be a healthy neighborhood for non-combatants when the ruction starts. I'm going if I have to buy a liner!"

"Nonsense!" said the girl. "This is the chance of a lifetime. I won't be cheated out of it by a silly old dad. Why, here we are, face to face with history!"

"American history is good enough for me," he spread-eagled. "What are you looking at?"

"Provincial to the death!" she said thoughtfully. "You old dear—I love you so! Some of our statesmen over home are going to look pretty foolish now in the face of things they can't understand. I hope you're not going to be one of them."

"Twaddle!" he cried. "I'm going to the steamship offices to-day and argue as I never argued for a vote."

His daughter saw that he was determined; and, wise from long experience, she did not try to dissuade him.

London that hot Monday was a city on the alert, a city of hearts heavy with dread. The rumors in one special edition of the papers were denied in the next and reaffirmed in the next. Men who could look into the future walked the streets with faces far from happy. Unrest ruled the town. And it found its

echo in the heart of the girl from Texas as she thought of her young friend of the Agony Column "in durance vile" behind the frowning walls of Scotland Yard.

That afternoon her father appeared, with the beaming mien of the victor, and announced that for a stupendous sum he had bought the tickets of a man who was to have sailed on the steamship *Saronia* three days hence.

"The boat train leaves at ten Thursday morning," he said. "Take your last look at Europe and be ready."

Three days! His daughter listened with sinking heart. Could she in three days' time learn the end of that strange mystery, know the final fate of the man who had first addressed her so unconventionally in a public print? Why, at the end of three days he might still be in

Scotland Yard, a prisoner! She could not leave if that were true—she simply could not. Almost she was on the point of telling her father the story of the whole affair, confident that she could soothe his anger and enlist his aid. She decided to wait until the next morning; and, if no letter came then—

But on Tuesday morning a letter did come and the beginning of it brought pleasant news. The beginning—yes. But the end! This was the letter:

DEAR ANXIOUS LADY: Is it too much for me to assume that you have been just that, knowing as you did that I was locked up for the murder of a captain in the Indian Army, with the evidence all against me and hope a very still small voice indeed?

The Agony Column

Well, dear lady, be anxious no longer. I have just lived through the most astounding day of all the astounding days that have been my portion since last Thursday. And now, in the dusk, I sit again in my rooms, a free man, and write to you in what peace and quiet I can command after the startling adventure through which I have recently passed.

Suspicion no longer points to me; constables no longer eye me; Scotland Yard is not even slightly interested in me. For the murderer of Captain Fraser-Freer has been caught at last!

Sunday night I spent ingloriously in a cell in Scotland Yard. I could not sleep. I had so much to think of—you, for example, and at intervals how I might escape from the folds of the net that had closed so tightly about me. My friend

at the consulate, Watson, called on me late in the evening; and he was very kind. But there was a note lacking in his voice, and after he was gone the terrible certainty came into my mind—he believed that I was guilty after all.

The night passed, and a goodly portion of to-day went by—as the poets say—with lagging feet. I thought of London, yellow in the sun. I thought of the Carlton—I suppose there are no more strawberries by this time. And my waiter—that stiff-backed Prussian—is home in Deutschland now, I presume, marching with his regiment. I thought of you.

At three o'clock this afternoon they came for me and I was led back to the room belonging to Inspector Bray. When I entered, however, the inspector was not there—only Colonel Hughes, immaculate

and self-possessed, as usual, gazing out the window into the cheerless stone court. He turned when I entered. I suppose I must have had a most woebegone appearance, for a look of regret crossed his face.

"My dear fellow," he cried, "my most humble apologies! I intended to have you released last night. But, believe me, I have been frightfully busy."

I said nothing. What could I say? The fact that he had been busy struck me as an extremely silly excuse. But the inference that my escape from the toils of the law was imminent set my heart to thumping.

"I fear you can never forgive me for throwing you over as I did yesterday," he went on. "I can only say that it was absolutely necessary—as you shall shortly understand."

I thawed a bit. After all, there was an unmistakable sincerity in his voice and manner.

"We are waiting for Inspector Bray," continued the colonel. "I take it you wish to see this thing through?"

"To the end," I answered.

"Naturally. The inspector was called away yesterday immediately after our interview with him. He had business on the Continent, I understand. But fortunately I managed to reach him at Dover and he has come back to London. I wanted him, you see, because I have found the murderer of Captain Fraser-Freer."

I thrilled to hear that, for from my point of view it was certainly a consummation devoutly to be wished. The colonel did not speak again. In a few min-

utes the door opened and Bray came in. His clothes looked as though he had slept in them; his little eyes were bloodshot. But in those eyes there was a fire I shall never forget. Hughes bowed.

"Good afternoon, Inspector," he said. "I'm really sorry I had to interrupt you as I did; but I most awfully wanted you to know that you owe me a Homburg hat." He went closer to the detective. "You see, I have won that wager. I have found the man who murdered Captain Fraser-Freer."

Curiously enough, Bray said nothing. He sat down at his desk and idly glanced through the pile of mail that lay upon it. Finally he looked up and said in a weary tone:

"You're very clever, I'm sure, Colonel Hughes."

"Oh—I wouldn't say that," replied Hughes. "Luck was with me—from the first. I am really very glad to have been of service in the matter, for I am convinced that if I had not taken part in the search it would have gone hard with some innocent man."

Bray's big pudgy hands still played idly with the mail on his desk. Hughes went on:

"Perhaps, as a clever detective, you will be interested in the series of events which enabled me to win that Homburg hat? You have heard, no doubt, that the man I have caught is Von der Herts—ten years ago the best secret-service man in the employ of the Berlin government, but for the past few years mysteriously missing from our line of vision. We've been wondering about him—at the War Office."

The colonel dropped into a chair, facing Bray.

"You know Von der Herts, of course?" he remarked casually.

"Of course," said Bray, still in that dead tired voice.

"He is the head of that crowd in England," went on Hughes. "Rather a feather in my cap to get him—but I mustn't boast. Poor Fraser-Freer would have got him if I hadn't—only Von der Herts had the luck to get the captain first."

Bray raised his eyes.

"You said you were going to tell me—" he began.

"And so I am," said Hughes. "Captain Fraser-Freer got in rather a mess in India and failed of promotion. It was suspected that he was discontented, soured

on the Service; and the Countess Sophie de Graf was set to beguile him with her charms, to kill his loyalty and win him over to her crowd.

"It was thought she had succeeded—the Wilhelmstrasse thought so—we at the War Office thought so, as long as he stayed in India.

"But when the captain and the woman came on to London we discovered that we had done him a great injustice. He let us know, when the first chance offered, that he was trying to redeem himself, to round up a dangerous band of spies by pretending to be one of them. He said that it was his mission in London to meet Von der Herts, the greatest of them all; and that, once he had located this man, we would hear from him again. In the weeks that followed I continued to keep a watch on

the countess; and I kept track of the captain, too, in a general way, for I'm ashamed to say I was not quite sure of him."

The colonel got up and walked to the window; then turned and continued:

"Captain Fraser-Freer and Von der Herts were completely unknown to each other. The mails were barred as a means of communication; but Fraser-Freer knew that in some way word from the master would reach him, and he had had a tip to watch the personal column of the *Daily Mail*. Now we have the explanation of those four odd messages. From that column the man from Rangoon learned that he was to wear a white aster in his button-hole, a scarab pin in his tie, a Homburg hat on his head, and meet Von der Herts at Ye Old Gambrinus Res-

taurant in Regent Street, last Thursday night at ten o'clock. As we know, he made all arrangements to comply with those directions. He made other arrangements as well. Since it was out of the question for him to come to Scotland Yard, by skilful maneuvering he managed to interview an inspector of police at the Hotel Cecil. It was agreed that on Thursday night Von der Herts would be placed under arrest the moment he made himself known to the captain."

Hughes paused. Bray still idled with his pile of letters, while the colonel regarded him gravely.

"Poor Fraser-Freer!" Hughes went on. "Unfortunately for him, Von der Herts knew almost as soon as did the inspector that a plan was afoot to trap him. There was but one course open to him: He lo-

cated the captain's lodgings, went there at seven that night, and killed a loyal and brave Englishman where he stood."

A tense silence filled the room. I sat on the edge of my chair, wondering just where all this unwinding of the tangle was leading us.

"I had little, indeed, to work on," went on Hughes. "But I had this advantage: The spy thought the police, and the police alone, were seeking the murderer. He was at no pains to throw me off his track, because he did not suspect that I was on it. For weeks my men had been watching the countess. I had them continue to do so. I figured that sooner or later Von der Herts would get in touch with her. I was right. And when at last I saw with my own eyes the man who must, beyond all question, be Von der

Herts, I was astounded, my dear Inspector, I was overwhelmed."

"Yes?" said Bray.

"I set to work then in earnest to connect him with that night in Adelphi Terrace. All the finger marks in the captain's study were for some reason destroyed, but I found others outside, in the dust on that seldom-used gate which leads from the garden. Without his knowing, I secured from the man I suspected the imprint of his right thumb. A comparison was startling. Next I went down into Fleet Street and luckily managed to get hold of the typewritten copy sent to the *Mail* bearing those four messages. I noticed that in these the letter *a* was out of alignment. I maneuvered to get a letter written on a typewriter belonging to my man. The *a* was out of alignment. Then Archi-

bald Enwright, a renegade and waster well known to us as serving other countries, came to England. My man and he met—at Ye Old Gambrinus, in Regent Street. And finally, on a visit to the lodgings of this man who, I was now certain, was Von der Herts, under the mattress of his bed I found this knife."

And Colonel Hughes threw down upon the inspector's desk the knife from India that I had last seen in the study of Captain Fraser-Freer.

"All these points of evidence were in my hands yesterday morning in this room," Hughes went on. "Still, the answer they gave me was so unbelievable, so astounding, I was not satisfied; I wanted even stronger proof. That is why I directed suspicion to my American friend here. I was waiting. I knew that at last

Von der Herts realized the danger he was in. I felt that if opportunity were offered he would attempt to escape from England; and then our proofs of his guilt would be unanswerable, despite his cleverness. True enough, in the afternoon he secured the release of the countess, and together they started for the Continent. I was lucky enough to get him at Dover—and glad to let the lady go on."

And now, for the first time, the startling truth struck me full in the face as Hughes smiled down at his victim.

"Inspector Bray," he said, "or Von der Herts, as you choose, I arrest you on two counts: First, as the head of the Wilhelmstrasse spy system in England; second, as the murderer of Captain Fraser-Freer. And, if you will allow me, I wish to compliment you on your efficiency."

Bray did not reply for a moment. I sat numb in my chair. Finally the inspector looked up. He actually tried to smile.

"You win the hat," he said, "but you must go to Homburg for it. I will gladly pay all expenses."

"Thank you," answered Hughes. "I hope to visit your country before long; but I shall not be occupied with hats. Again I congratulate you. You were a bit careless, but your position justified that. As head of the department at Scotland Yard given over to the hunt for spies, precaution doubtless struck you as unnecessary. How unlucky for poor Fraser-Freer that it was to you he went to arrange for your own arrest! I got that information from a clerk at the Cecil. You were quite right, from your point of view, to kill him. And, as I say, you could

afford to be rather reckless. You had arranged that when the news of his murder came to Scotland Yard you yourself would be on hand to conduct the search for the guilty man. A happy situation, was it not?"

"It seemed so at the time," admitted Bray; and at last I thought I detected a note of bitterness in his voice.

"I'm very sorry—really," said Hughes. "To-day, or to-morrow at the latest, England will enter the war. You know what that means, Von der Herts. The Tower of London—and a firing squad!"

Deliberately he walked away from the inspector, and stood facing the window. Von der Herts was fingering idly that Indian knife which lay on his desk. With a quick hunted look about the room, he raised his hand; and before I could leap

forward to stop him he had plunged the knife into his heart.

Colonel Hughes turned round at my cry, but even at what met his eyes now that Englishman was imperturbable.

"Too bad!" he said. "Really too bad! The man had courage and, beyond all doubt, brains. But—this is most considerate of him. He has saved me such a lot of trouble."

The colonel effected my release at once; and he and I walked down Whitehall together in the bright sun that seemed so good to me after the bleak walls of the Yard. Again he apologized for turning suspicion my way the previous day; but I assured him I held no grudge for that.

"One or two things I do not understand," I said. "That letter I brought from Interlaken—"

"Simple enough," he replied. "Enwright—who, by the way, is now in the Tower—wanted to communicate with Fraser-Freer, who he supposed was a loyal member of the band. Letters sent by post seemed dangerous. With your kind assistance he informed the captain of his whereabouts and the date of his imminent arrival in London. Fraser-Freer, not wanting you entangled in his plans, eliminated you by denying the existence of this cousin—the truth, of course."

"Why," I asked, "did the countess call on me to demand that I alter my testimony?"

"Bray sent her. He had rifled Fraser-Freer's desk and he held that letter from Enwright. He was most anxious to fix the guilt upon the young lieutenant's head. You and your testimony as to the

hour of the crime stood in the way. He sought to intimidate you with threats—"

"But—"

"I know—you are wondering why the countess confessed to me next day. I had the woman in rather a funk. In the meshes of my rapid-fire questioning she became hopelessly involved. This was because she was suddenly terrified; she realized I must have been watching her for weeks, and that perhaps Von der Herts was not so immune from suspicion as he supposed. At the proper moment I suggested that I might have to take her to Inspector Bray. This gave her an idea. She made her fake confession to reach his side; once there, she warned him of his danger and they fled together."

We walked along a moment in silence. All about us the lurid special editions of

the afternoon were flaunting their predictions of the horror to come. The face of the colonel was grave.

"How long had Von der Herts held his position at the Yard?" I asked.

"For nearly five years," Hughes answered.

"It seems incredible," I murmured.

"So it does," he answered; "but it is only the first of many incredible things that this war will reveal. Two months from now we shall all have forgotten it in the face of new revelations far more unbelievable." He sighed. "If these men about us realized the terrible ordeal that lies ahead! Misgoverned; unprepared—I shudder at the thought of the sacrifices we must make, many of them in vain. But I suppose that somehow, some day, we shall muddle through."

A Warner Bros. Talking Picture

The Agony Column, Photoplay Title The Second Floor Mystery.

He bade me good-by in Trafalgar Square, saying that he must at once seek out the father and brother of the late captain, and tell them the news—that their kinsman was really loyal to his country.

"It will come to them as a ray of light in the dark—my news," he said. "And now, thank you once again."

We parted and I came back here to my lodgings. The mystery is finally solved, though in such a way it is difficult to believe that it was anything but a nightmare at any time. But solved none the less; and I should be at peace, except for one great black fact that haunts me, will not let me rest. I must tell you, dear lady— And yet I fear it means the end of everything. If only I can make you understand!

I have walked my floor, deep in thought, in puzzlement, in indecision.

Now I have made up my mind. There is no other way—I must tell you the truth.

Despite the fact that Bray was Von der Herts; despite the fact that he killed himself at the discovery—despite this and that, and everything—Bray did not kill Captain Fraser-Freer!

On last Thursday evening, at a little after seven o'clock, I myself climbed the stairs, entered the captain's rooms, picked up that knife from his desk, and stabbed him just above the heart!

What provocation I was under, what stern necessity moved me—all this you must wait until to-morrow to know. I shall spend another anxious day preparing my defense, hoping that through some miracle of mercy you may forgive me—understand that there was nothing else I could do.

Do not judge, dear lady, until you know everything—until all my evidence is in your lovely hands.

YOURS, IN ALL HUMILITY.

The first few paragraphs of this the sixth and next to the last letter from the Agony Column man had brought a smile of relief to the face of the girl who read. She was decidedly glad to learn that her friend no longer languished back of those gray walls on Victoria Embankment. With excitement that increased as she went along, she followed Colonel Hughes as—in the letter—he moved nearer and nearer his dénouement, until finally his finger pointed to Inspector Bray sitting guilty in his chair. This was an eminently satisfactory solution, and it served the inspector right for locking up her friend. Then, with the suddenness of a

bomb from a Zeppelin, came, at the end, her strawberry man's confession of guilt. He was the murderer, after all! He admitted it! She could scarcely believe her eyes.

Yet there it was, in ink as violet as those eyes, on the note paper that had become so familiar to her during the thrilling week just past. She read it a second time, and yet a third. Her amazement gave way to anger; her cheeks flamed. Still—he had asked her not to judge until all his evidence was in. This was a reasonable request surely, and she could not in fairness refuse to grant it.

CHAPTER VIII

SO BEGAN an anxious day, not only for the girl from Texas but for all London as well. Her father was bursting with new diplomatic secrets recently extracted from his bootblack adviser. Later, in Washington, he was destined to be a marked man because of his grasp of the situation abroad. No one suspected the bootblack, the power behind the throne; but the gentleman from Texas was destined to think of that able diplomat many times, and to wish that he still had him at his feet to advise him.

"War by midnight, sure!" he proclaimed on the morning of this fateful Tuesday. "I tell you, Marian, we're

lucky to have our tickets on the *Saronia.* Five thousand dollars wouldn't buy them from me to-day! I'll be a happy man when we go aboard that liner day after to-morrow."

Day after to-morrow! The girl wondered. At any rate, she would have that last letter then—the letter that was to contain whatever defense her young friend could offer to explain his dastardly act. She waited eagerly for that final epistle.

The day dragged on, bringing at its close England's entrance into the war; and the Carlton bootblack was a prophet not without honor in a certain Texas heart. And on the following morning there arrived a letter which was torn open by eager trembling fingers. The letter spoke:

DEAR LADY JUDGE: This is by far the

hardest to write of all the letters you have had from me. For twenty-four hours I have been planning it. Last night I walked on the Embankment while the hansoms jogged by and the lights of the tramcars danced on Westminster Bridge just as the fireflies used to in the garden back of our house in Kansas. While I walked I planned. To-day, shut up in my rooms, I was also planning. And yet now, when I sit down to write, I am still confused; still at a loss where to begin and what to say, once I have begun.

At the close of my last letter I confessed to you that it was I who murdered Captain Fraser-Freer. That is the truth. Soften the blow as I may, it all comes down to that. The bitter truth!

Not a week ago—last Thursday night at seven—I climbed our dark stairs and

plunged a knife into the heart of that defenseless gentleman. If only I could point out to you that he had offended me in some way; if I could prove to you that his death was necessary to me, as it really was to Inspector Bray—then there might be some hope of your ultimate pardon. But, alas! he had been most kind to me—kinder than I have allowed you to guess from my letters. There was no actual need to do away with him. Where shall I look for a defense?

At the moment the only defense I can think of is simply this—the captain knows I killed him!

Even as I write this, I hear his footsteps above me, as I heard them when I sat here composing my first letter to you. He is dressing for dinner. We are to dine together at Romano's.

And there, my lady, you have finally the answer to the mystery that has—I hope—puzzled you. I killed my friend the captain in my second letter to you, and all the odd developments that followed lived only in my imagination as I sat here beside the green-shaded lamp in my study, plotting how I should write seven letters to you that would, as the novel advertisements say, grip your attention to the very end. Oh, I am guilty—there is no denying that. And, though I do not wish to ape old Adam and imply that I was tempted by a lovely woman, a strict regard for the truth forces me to add that there is also guilt upon your head. How so? Go back to that message you inserted in the *Daily Mail*: "The grapefruit lady's great fondness for mystery and romance—"

You did not know it, of course; but in those words you passed me a challenge I could not resist; for making plots is the business of life—more, the breath of life—to me. I have made many; and perhaps you have followed some of them, on Broadway. Perhaps you have seen a play of mine announced for early production in London. There was mention of it in the program at the Palace. That was the business which kept me in England. The project has been abandoned now and I am free to go back home.

Thus you see that when you granted me the privilege of those seven letters you played into my hands. So, said I, she longs for mystery and romance. Then, by the Lord Harry, she shall have them!

And it was the tramp of Captain Fraser-Freer's boots above my head that

showed me the way. A fine, stalwart, cordial fellow—the captain—who has been very kind to me since I presented my letter of introduction from his cousin, Archibald Enwright. Poor Archie! A meek, correct little soul, who would be horrified beyond expression if he knew that of him I had made a spy and a frequenter of Limehouse!

The dim beginnings of the plot were in my mind when I wrote that first letter, suggesting that all was not regular in the matter of Archie's note of introduction. Before I wrote my second, I knew that nothing but the death of Fraser-Freer would do me. I recalled that Indian knife I had seen upon his desk, and from that moment he was doomed. At that time I had no idea how I should solve the mystery. But I had read and wondered at

those four strange messages in the *Mail,* and I resolved that they must figure in the scheme of things.

The fourth letter presented difficulties until I returned from dinner that night and saw a taxi waiting before our quiet house. Hence the visit of the woman with the lilac perfume. I am afraid the Wilhelmstrasse would have little use for a lady spy who advertised herself in so foolish a manner. Time for writing the fifth letter arrived. I felt that I should now be placed under arrest. I had a faint little hope that you would be sorry about that. Oh, I'm a brute, I know!

Early in the game I had told the captain of the cruel way in which I had disposed of him. He was much amused; but he insisted, absolutely, that he must be vindicated before the close of the series,

and I was with him there. He had been so bully about it all! A chance remark of his gave me my solution. He said he had it on good authority that the chief of the Czar's bureau for capturing spies in Russia was himself a spy. And so—why not a spy in Scotland Yard?

I assure you, I am most contrite as I set all this down here. You must remember that when I began my story there was no idea of war. Now all Europe is aflame; and in the face of the great conflict, the awful suffering to come, I and my little plot begin to look—well, I fancy you know just how we look.

Forgive me. I am afraid I can never find the words to tell you how important it seemed to interest you in my letters—to make you feel that I am an entertaining person worthy of your notice. That

morning when you entered the Carlton breakfast room was really the biggest in my life. I felt as though you had brought with you through that doorway— But I have no right to say it. I have the right to say nothing save that now—it is all left to you. If I have offended, then I shall never hear from you again.

The captain will be here in a moment. It is near the hour set and he is never late. He is not to return to India, but expects to be drafted for the Expeditionary Force that will be sent to the Continent. I hope the German Army will be kinder to him than I was!

My name is Geoffrey West. I live at nineteen Adelphi Terrace—in rooms that look down on the most wonderful garden in London. That, at least, is real. It is very quiet there to-night, with the city

and its continuous hum of war and terror seemingly a million miles away.

Shall we meet at last? The answer rests entirely with you. But, believe me, I shall be anxiously waiting to know; and if you decide to give me a chance to explain—to denounce myself to you in person—then a happy man will say good-by to this garden and these dim dusty rooms and follow you to the ends of the earth—aye, to Texas itself!

Captain Fraser-Freer is coming down the stairs. Is this good-by forever, my lady? With all my soul, I hope not.

YOUR CONTRITE STRAWBERRY MAN.

CHAPTER IX

WORDS are futile things with which to attempt a description of the feelings of the girl at the Carlton as she read this, the last letter of seven written to her through the medium of her maid, Sadie Haight. Turning the pages of the dictionary casually, one might enlist a few—for example, amazement, anger, unbelief, wonder. Perhaps, to go back to the letter *a,* even amusement. We may leave her with the solution to the puzzle in her hand, the *Saronia* a little more than a day away, and a weirdly mixed company of emotions struggling in her soul.

And leaving her thus, let us go back to Adelphi Terrace and a young man exceedingly worried.

Once he knew that his letter was delivered, Mr. Geoffrey West took his place most humbly on the anxious seat. There he writhed through the long hours of Wednesday morning. Not to prolong this painful picture, let us hasten to add that at three o'clock that same afternoon came a telegram that was to end suspense. He tore it open and read:

STRAWBERRY MAN: I shall never, never forgive you. But we are sailing tomorrow on the *Saronia*. Were you thinking of going home soon?

MARIAN A. LARNED.

Thus it happened that, a few minutes later, to the crowd of troubled Americans in a certain steamship booking office there

was added a wild-eyed young man who further upset all who saw him. To weary clerks he proclaimed in fiery tones that he must sail on the *Saronia*. There seemed to be no way of appeasing him. The offer of a private liner would not have interested him.

He raved and tore his hair. He ranted. All to no avail. There was, in plain American, "nothing doing!"

Damp but determined, he sought among the crowd for one who had bookings on the *Saronia*. He could find, at first, no one so lucky; but finally he ran across Tommy Gray. Gray, an old friend, admitted when pressed that he had a passage on that most desirable boat. But the offer of all the king's horses and all the king's gold left him unmoved. Much, he said, as he would have liked to oblige, he

and his wife were determined. They would sail.

It was then that Geoffrey West made a compact with his friend. He secured from him the necessary steamer labels and it was arranged that his baggage was to go aboard the *Saronia* as the property of Gray.

"But," protested Gray, "even suppose you do put this through; suppose you do manage to sail without a ticket—where will you sleep? In chains somewhere below, I fancy."

"No matter!" bubbled West. "I'll sleep in the dining saloon, in a lifeboat, on the lee scuppers—whatever they are. I'll sleep in the air, without any visible support! I'll sleep anywhere—nowhere—but I'll sail! And as for irons—they don't make 'em strong enough to hold me."

The Agony Column

At five o'clock on Thursday afternoon the *Saronia* slipped smoothly away from a Liverpool dock. Twenty-five hundred Americans—about twice the number the boat could comfortably carry—stood on her decks and cheered. Some of those in that crowd who had millions of money were booked for the steerage. All of them were destined to experience during that crossing hunger, annoyance, discomfort. They were to be stepped on, sat on, crowded and jostled. They suspected as much when the boat left the dock. Yet they cheered!

Gayest among them was Geoffrey West, triumphant amid the confusion. He was safely aboard; the boat was on its way! Little did it trouble him that he went as a stowaway, since he had no ticket; nothing but an overwhelming de-

termination to be on the good ship *Saronia.*

That night as the *Saronia* stole along with all deck lights out and every porthole curtained, West saw on the dim deck the slight figure of a girl who meant much to him. She was standing staring out over the black waters; and, with wildly beating heart, he approached her, not knowing what to say, but feeling that a start must be made somehow.

"Please pardon me for addressing you," he began. "But I want to tell you—"

She turned, startled; and then smiled an odd little smile, which he could not see in the dark.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I haven't met you, that I recall—"

"I know," he answered. "That's going to be arranged to-morrow. Mrs.

Tommy Gray says you crossed with them—"

"Mere steamer acquaintances," the girl replied coldly.

"Of course! But Mrs. Gray is a darling—she'll fix that all right. I just want to say, before to-morrow comes—"

"Wouldn't it be better to wait?"

"I can't! I'm on this ship without a ticket. I've got to go down in a minute and tell the purser that. Maybe he'll throw me overboard; maybe he'll lock me up. I don't know what they do with people like me. Maybe they'll make a stoker of me. And then I shall have to stoke, with no chance of seeing you again. So that's why I want to say now—I'm sorry I have such a keen imagination. It carried me away—really it did! I didn't mean to deceive you with those letters; but, once I

got started— You know, don't you, that I love you with all my heart? From the moment you came into the Carlton that morning I—"

"Really—Mr.—Mr.—"

"West—Geoffrey West. I adore you! What can I do to prove it? I'm going to prove it—before this ship docks in the North River. Perhaps I'd better talk to your father, and tell him about the Agony Column and those seven letters—"

"You'd better not! He's in a terribly bad humor. The dinner was awful, and the steward said we'd be looking back to it and calling it a banquet before the voyage ends. Then, too, poor dad says he simply can not sleep in the stateroom they've given him—"

"All the better! I'll see him at once. If he stands for me now he'll stand for me

any time! And, before I go down and beard a harsh-looking purser in his den, won't you believe me when I say I'm deeply in love—"

"In love with mystery and romance! In love with your own remarkable powers of invention! Really, I can't take you seriously—"

"Before this voyage is ended you'll have to. I'll prove to you that I care. If the purser lets me go free—"

"You have much to prove," the girl smiled. "To-morrow—when Mrs. Tommy Gray introduces us—I may accept you—as a builder of plots. I happen to know you are good. But—as— It's too silly! Better go and have it out with that purser."

Reluctantly he went. In five minutes he was back. The girl was still standing by the rail.

"It's all right!" West said. "I thought I was doing something original, but there were eleven other people in the same fix. One of them is a billionaire from Wall Street. The purser collected some money from us and told us to sleep on the deck —if we could find room."

"I'm sorry," said the girl. "I rather fancied you in the rôle of stoker." She glanced about her at the dim deck. "Isn't this exciting? I'm sure this voyage is going to be filled with mystery and romance."

"I know it will be full of romance," West answered. "And the mystery will be—can I convince you—"

"Hush!" broke in the girl. "Here comes father! I shall be very happy to meet you—to-morrow. Poor dad! He's looking for a place to sleep."

Five days later poor dad, having slept each night on deck in his clothes while the ship plowed through a cold drizzle, and having starved in a sadly depleted dining saloon, was a sight to move the heart of a political opponent. Immediately after a dinner that had scarcely satisfied a healthy Texas appetite he lounged gloomily in the deck chair which was now his stateroom. Jauntily Geoffrey West came and sat at his side.

"Mr. Larned," he said, "I've got something for you."

And, with a kindly smile, he took from his pocket and handed over a large, warm baked potato. The Texan eagerly accepted the gift.

"Where'd you get it?" he demanded, breaking open his treasure.

"That's a secret," West answered. "But

I can get as many as I want. Mr. Larned, I can say this—you will not go hungry any longer. And there's something else I ought to speak of. I am sort of aiming to marry your daughter."

Deep in his potato the Congressman spoke:

"What does she say about it?"

"Oh, she says there isn't a chance. But—"

"Then look out, my boy! She's made up her mind to have you."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I really ought to tell you who I am. Also, I want you to know that, before your daughter and I met, I wrote her seven letters—"

"One minute," broke in the Texan. "Before you go into all that, won't you be a good fellow and tell me where you got this potato?"

West nodded.

"Sure!" he said; and, leaning over, he whispered.

For the first time in days a smile appeared on the face of the older man.

"My boy," he said, "I feel I'm going to like you. Never mind the rest. I heard all about you from your friend Gray; and as for those letters—they were the only thing that made the first part of this trip bearable. Marian gave them to me to read the night we came on board."

Suddenly from out of the clouds a long-lost moon appeared, and bathed that overcrowded ocean liner in a flood of silver. West left the old man to his potato and went to find the daughter.

She was standing in the moonlight by the rail of the forward deck, her eyes staring dreamily ahead toward the great

country that had sent her forth light-heartedly for to adventure and to see. She turned as West came up.

"I have just been talking with your father," he said. "He tells me he thinks you mean to take me, after all."

She laughed.

"To-morrow night," she answered, "will be our last on board. I shall give you my final decision then."

"But that is twenty-four hours away! Must I wait so long as that?"

"A little suspense won't hurt you. I can't forget those long days when I waited for your letters—"

"I know! But can't you give me—just a little hint—here—to-night?"

"I am without mercy—absolutely without mercy!"

And then, as West's fingers closed over

her hand, she added softly: "Not even the suspicion of a hint, my dear—except to tell you that—my answer will be—yes."

THE END

Fifty Candles

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Fifty Candles

I

From the records of the district court at Honolulu for the year 1898 you may, if you have patience, unearth the dim beginnings of this story of the fifty candles. It is a story that stretches over twenty years, all the way from that bare Honolulu court room to a night of fog and violence in San Francisco. Many months after the night of the tule-fog I happened into the Hawaiian capital, and took down from a library shelf a big legal-looking book, bound in bright yellow leather the color of a Filipino

house-boy's shoes on his Saturday night in town. I found what I was looking for under the heading: "In the Matter of Chang See."

The Chinese, we are told, are masters of indirection, of saying one thing and meaning another, of arriving at their goal by way of a devious, irrelevant maze. Our legal system must have been invented and perfected by Chinamen—but is this lese-majesty or contempt of court or something? Beyond question the decision of the learned court in the matter of Chang See, as set down in the big yellow book, is obscured and befuddled by a mass of unspeakably dreary words. See 21 Cyc., 317 Church Habeas Corpus, 2d Ed., Sec. 169. By all means consult Kelley v. Johnson, 31 U. S. (6 Pet.) 622, 631-32. And many more of the same sort.

Here and there, however, you will happen on phrases that mean something to the layman; that indicate, behind the

barrier of legal verbiage, the presence of a flesh-and-blood human fighting for his freedom—for his very life. Piece these phrases together and you may be able to reconstruct the scene in the court room that day in 1898, when a lean impassive Chinaman of thirty stood alone against the great American nation. In other words, Chang See v. U. S.

I say he stood alone, though he was, of course, represented by counsel. "Harry Childs for the Petitioner," says the big yellow book. Poor Harry Childs—his mind was already beginning to go. It had been keen enough when he came to the islands, but the hot sun and the cool drinks—well, he was a little hazy that day in court. He died long ago—just shriveled up and died of an overdose of the Paradise of the Pacific—so it can hardly injure his professional standing to intimate that he was of little aid to his client in the matter of Chang See.

Chang See was petitioning the United

States for a writ of habeas corpus and his freedom from the custody of the inspector of immigration at the port of Honolulu. He had arrived at the port from China some two months previously, bringing with him a birth certificate recently obtained and forwarded to him by friends in Honolulu. This certificate asserted that Chang See had been born in Honolulu of Chinese parents—that he had first seen the light on a December day thirty years before in a house out near Queen Emma's yard, on the beach at Waikiki. When he was four years old his parents had taken him back with them to their native village of Sun Chin, in China.

If the certificate spoke the truth, then Chang See must be regarded as an American citizen and freely admitted to Honolulu with no wearisome chatter about the Chinese Exclusion Act. But the inspector at the port had been made wary by long service. He admitted that

the certificate was undoubtedly founded on fact. But, he contended, how was he to know that this tall, wise-looking Chinaman was the little boy Chang See who had once played about the beach at Waikiki?

Thus challenged, the petitioner brought in witnesses to prove his identity. He brought twelve of them in all—shuffling old men, ancient dames with black silk trousers and tiny feet, younger sports prominent in the night life of Hotel Street. Some of them were reputed to have known him as a baby out near Queen Emma's yard; others had been the companions of the days of his youth in the village of Sun Chin.

Chang See's witnesses had begun their testimony before the inspector confidently enough. Then under the inspector's stony stare they had weakened. They had become confused, contradictory. Even the man who had obtained the birth certificate gave as the name of

Chang See's father an entirely new and unheard-of appellation. In a word, the petitioner's friends one and all deserted him. Something seemed to have happened to them.

Something had happened to them. That something was the vivid remembrance of a little old lady with a thin face and cruel eyes, who was at the moment sitting in Peking, the virtual ruler of all China. Chang See had been lately active in fields that did not appeal to the dowager empress. He had been one of the group of brilliant reformers who had come so near winning the young emperor to their way of thinking, until that day in September when the empress had put down her foot, with its six-inch Manchu sole, made the emperor practically a prisoner in the palace, and announced that those who wished to change the existing order in China would please see her first. And if she saw them first——

She didn't see many of them. They fled for their lives, Chang See among them. His witnesses knew this. They knew that the little old lady was sitting waiting in the midst of her web at Peking—waiting and hoping for the return of Chang See. They knew that the dear old thing had virtually promised to have a man ready with a basket to catch Chang See's head as it fell. Overcome with fear for themselves, for their people at home, they became foggy of mind, uncertain of names and dates. And Chang See's case went to smash on the rock of their indifference.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the inspector of immigration was not convinced of the petitioner's identity. Following the usual formula, Harry Childs appealed the case to Washington.

The officials there, with unexpected promptness, agreed with the inspector, and Chang See was driven to his last resort. He besought the district court in

Honolulu for a writ; and on a certain morning in December, '98—as a matter of fact it must have been Chang See's birthday, provided he was Chang See—he stood awaiting the decision of the judge.

I can picture that scene in court for you, partly from the records, partly from the story of one who was there and remembers. Judge Smith was presiding; "H. Smith," he has it in the yellow book, with the modesty required of judges by custom. He was a big, blond, cool-looking man with a rather peevish manner not uncommon among whites in a tropic country. He sat idly thumbing the pages of his decision. There were a good many of them, he noticed. The languid hour of noon was approaching, and through his mind flashed a vision of his *lanai*, close by the white breakers at Waikiki. An easy-chair and magazines just in from the mainland awaited him there; also bottles,

glasses and ice, all of which were capable of being brought into delightful touch with one another by an able Chinaman who had not been excluded.

H. Smith took a sip from a glass at his elbow—indubitably water—and began to read. He had, he said, studied with great diligence the petition submitted by counsel, which, he added with a disapproving glance at Harry Childs, was unnecessarily long and involved. The petitioner, as he understood it, based his application for a right to land on the assertion that he was Chang See, born of Chinese parents in Honolulu thirty years before, in a house near Queen Emma's yard at Waikiki. If the assertion were true, if the petitioner were Chang See, then as an American citizen he must be granted all he sought. But was this petitioner Chang See? The matter was clouded by grave doubts. Pass over the fact that he had waited more than twenty-nine years before asking for his

birth certificate. Pass over as well the fact that the man who had obtained the certificate had later, by his testimony, appeared uncertain of the name of Chang See's father. Turn to the testimony of the petitioner's other witnesses.

He analyzed that testimony. He tore it to shreds. All at once he was reminded of the case *in re* Wang Chi-tung, 3 U. S. District Court, Hawaii 601-610. He was reminded of other anecdotes of a like nature. His voice droned on and on. The clerk of court fumbled sleepily at his watch fob and scowled at Chang See, the petitioner. All this time wasted on a Chinaman!

H. Smith grew more genial when he came to the final page of his decision. After all, it had not taken so long as he expected. Summing it all up, quoting a few more authorities, he admitted at last that he shared the doubts of the inspector and the officials at Washington. He therefore, he added quite pleasantly,

remanded the petitioner into the custody of the inspector of immigration for deportation to China.

The petitioner was a student who understood many languages, and he needed no interpreter to translate for him the words of H. Smith. He heard them, however, without so much as the flicker of an eyelash. We know now that he was Chang See. There was no justice in the world for him that day; but no one could have read his despair in his face. Harry Childs, on the other hand, was not a nerveless Oriental. His tobacco heart ablaze with anger, the lawyer leaped to his feet. He did a most unprofessional thing.

"With all due respect to the dignity of this court," he cried, "I wish to advise Your Honor that you have sentenced this man to his death. Owing to his activities for reform in China there is a price on his head there to-day. I wish to add—I wish to say"—he faltered un-

der the angry glare bent upon him by H. Smith—"I wish to repeat and emphasize—you have sentenced this man to his death!"

Harry Childs had never been in high favor in that court, and if looks could kill he would then and there have preceded his client into eternity. Outwardly, however, the judicial calm was unruffled.

"The matter brought up by the learned counsel," said the judge—and legal verbiage sometimes lends itself admirably to sarcasm—"is not one involved in the petition as presented. I need hardly add that I regard it as a matter with which this court has no concern. The court is adjourned."

Chang See stood waiting not far from the judge's bench. Into his eyes had come an expression of amused contempt which might have annoyed the learned judge had he seen it. But H. Smith was already on his way to the cottage at

Waikiki. He waited, did the Chinaman, until the inspector came for him, and they started down the aisle together. It was only a narrow path between the benches, but it was the beginning of the road that must lead Chang See back to China and a most unpleasant death. Yet he set out on it with his head held high and with a firm brave step.

Did Chang See tread that path to its logical and bitter end? Did he come in time to the edge of the web in the center of which the dowager empress, spider-like, sat waiting? The story, as has been said, stretches over twenty years, and the succeeding chapters may seem, at first glance, irrelevant. But before we finish we shall be able to put together the pieces of our Chinese puzzle and know the end of the path that led at first between two rows of benches in a Honolulu court.

II

TWENTY years later, toward the close of 1918, I stepped from the gangplank of a China boat and for the first time in my life set foot in San Francisco. If you have always thought of San Francisco as the bonny merry city, the gay light-hearted city, I advise you not to enter it first when it is wrapped in the gloom of a tule-fog. You will suffer a sad disappointment, such as I knew on landing that dark December afternoon.

Heaven knows I ought to have been a happy man that day, fog or no fog, for I was coming back to my own land after four dreary years in China. Birds should have been singing, as the Chinese say, in the topmost branches of my

heart; I should have walked with brisk elated tread. Instead I crossed the dimly lighted pier shed, where yellow lamps burned wanly overhead, with lagging step, dragging my battered old bags after me. The injustice of the world lay heavy on my heart. For I was young, and I had been unfairly treated. Four years earlier, just graduated from the engineering department of a big technical institution in the East, I had set sail from Vancouver to take charge of a mine in China for Henry Drew. I met the old San Francisco millionaire in Shanghai—a little yellow-faced man with snapping black eyes and long thin hands that must have begun, even in the cradle, to reach and seize and hold.

The mine, he told me frankly, was little better than a joke so far. Its future was up to me. I would encounter many obstacles—inadequate pumping machinery, bribe-hunting officials, superstitious workmen fearful of disturb-

ing the earth dragon as our shaft sank deeper. If I could conquer in spite of everything, accomplish a miracle and make the mine pay, then in addition to my salary I was to receive a third interest in the property. I suppose he really meant it at the time. He said it more than once. I was very young, with boundless faith. I did not get that part of it in writing.

Through four awful years I labored for Henry Drew down there in Yunnan, the province of the cloudy south. One by one the obstacles gave way, and copper began to come from the mine. Now and then ugly disquieting rumors as to the sense of honor of old Drew drifted to me, but I put them resolutely out of my thoughts.

I might seem guilty of boasting if I went into details regarding the results of my work. It is enough to say that I succeeded. Again I met Henry Drew in Shanghai, and he told me he was proud

of me. I ventured to remind him of his promise of an interest in the property. He said I must be dreaming. He recalled no such promise. I was appalled. Could such things be? Angrily and at length I told him what I thought of him. He listened in silence.

"I'll accept it," he said when I paused for breath.

"Accept what?" I asked.

"Your resignation."

He got it, along with further comments on his character. I went back to my hotel to take up the difficult task of securing accommodations on a homebound boat.

All liners were crowded to suffocation in those days, but I finally managed to get a November sailing. I was informed that I, along with another male passenger, would be put into the cabin of the ship's doctor. Rumor had told me that old Henry Drew was sailing on the same boat, but I was hardly prepared, when I

went on board and entered my state-room, to find him there, bending over an open bag. Fate in playful mood had selected him as the third member of our party.

He was more upset than I, and made a strenuous effort to be assigned to some other room. But with all his money he could not manage it, and we set out on our homeward journey together. I would see him when I came in late at night, lying there in his berth with the light from the deck outside on his yellow face, his eyes closed—but wide awake. I think he was afraid of me. He had reason to be.

Anyhow, I was rid of his slimy presence now, there in that dim pier shed. It was one thing to be thankful for. And already the memory of what he had done to me was fading—for I had suffered a later and deeper wound. In the midst of the trouble with Drew I had met the most wonderful girl in the world.

and only a moment before, on the deck of the China boat, I had said good-by to her—forever.

I left the pier shed and stepped to the sidewalk outside. The air was heavy and wet with fog, the walk damp and slippery; liquid fog dripped down from telegraph wires overhead. I saw the blurred lights of the city, heard its ceaseless grumble, the clang of street-cars, the clatter of wheels on cobblestones. Weird mysterious figures slipped by me, stranger faces peered into mine and were gone. This was the Embarcadero, the old Barbary Coast famed round the world. Somewhere there in the mist were its dance-halls, where rovers of the broad Pacific had, in the vanished past, made merry after a sodden fashion. I stood, straining to see.

"Want a taxi, mister?" asked a dim figure at my side.

"If you can find one," I answered. "Things seem a bit thick."

"It's the tule-fog," he told me. "Drifts down every year about this time from the tule-fields between here and Sacramento. Never knew one to stick around so late in the day before. Yes, sir—this is sure unusual."

In reply to my query he told me that the tule was a sort of bulrush. And little Moses amid his bulrushes could have felt no more lost than I did at that moment.

"See what you can dig up," I ordered.

"You just wait here," he said. "It'll take time. Don't go away."

Again I stood alone amid the strange shadow shapes that came and went. Somewhere, behind that tule-curtain, the business of the town went on as usual. I made a neat pile of my luggage close to a telegraph pole and sat down to wait. My mind went back to the deck of the boat I had left, to Mary Will Tellfair, that wonderful girl.

And she was wonderful—in courage

and in charm. I had met her three weeks before in Shanghai; and it was her dark hour, as it was mine. For Mary Will had come five thousand miles to marry Jack Paige, her sweetheart in a sleepy southern town. She had not seen him for six years, but there had been many letters, and life at home was dull. Then, too, she had been very fond of him once, I judge. So there had been parties, and jokes, and tears, and Mary Will had sailed for Shanghai and her wedding.

It has happened to other girls, no doubt. Young Paige met her boat. He was very drunk, and there was in his face evidence of a fall to depths unspeakable. Poor Mary Will saw at the first frightened look that the boy she had known and loved was gone forever. Many of the other girls—helpless, without money, alone—marry the men and make the best of it. Not Mary Will. Helpless, without money, alone, she was

still brave enough to hold her head high and refuse.

Henry Drew had heard of her plight and whatever his motive, had done a kind act for once. He engaged Mary Will as companion for his wife, and on the boat coming over the girl and Mrs. Drew had occupied a cabin with a frail little missionary woman. For husbands and wives were ruthlessly torn apart, that each stateroom might have its full quota of three. As I sat there with the fog dripping down upon me I pictured again our good-by on the deck, where we had been lined up to await the port doctor and be frisked, as a frivolous ship's officer put it, for symptoms of yellow fever. By chance—more or less—I was waiting beside Mary Will.

"Too bad you can't see the harbor," said Mary Will. "Only six weeks ago I sailed away—and the sun was on it—it's beautiful. But this silly old fog——"

"Never mind the fog," I told her.

"Please listen to me. What are you going to do? Where are you going? Home?"

"Home!" A bitter look came into her clear blue eyes. "I can't go home."

"Why not?"

"Don't you understand? There were showers—showers for the bride-to-be. And I kissed everybody good-by and hurried away to be married. Can I go back—husbandless?"

"You don't have to. I told you last night——"

"I know. In the moonlight, with the band on the boat deck playing a waltz. You said you loved me——"

"And I do."

She shook her head.

"You pity me. And it seems like love to you. But pity—pity isn't love."

Confound the girl! This was her story, and she seemed determined to stick to it.

"Ah, yes," said I scornfully. "What

pearls of wisdom fall from youthful lips."

"You'll discover how very wise I was—in time."

"Perhaps. But you haven't answered my question. What are you going to do? You can't stay on with the Drews—that little rotter——"

"I know. He hasn't been nice to you. But he has been nice to me—very."

"No man could help but be. And it hasn't done that young wife of his any harm to have a companion like you—for a change. But it's not a job I care to see held by the girl I mean to marry."

"What girl is that?"

"The girl who has it at present."

"If you mean me—I shan't go on being a companion. Mr. Drew has promised to find me a position in San Francisco. They say it's a charming city."

"I don't like to see you mixed up with Drew and his kind," I protested. "I'll not leave San Francisco until you do."

"Then you're going to settle down here. How nice!"

I could have slapped her. She was that sort of stubborn delightful child, and loving her was often that sort of emotion. The port doctor had reached her now in his passage down the line, and he stared firmly into her eyes, hunting symptoms. As he stared his hard face softened into a rather happy smile. I could have told him that looking into Mary Will's eyes had always that effect.

"You're all right," he laughed, then turned and glared at me as though he dared me to make public his lapse into a human being. He went on down the line. After him came Parker, the ship's doctor, with a wink at me, as much as to say: "Red tape. What a bore!"

The foghorn was making a frightful din, the scene was all confusion, impatience. It was no moment for what I was about to say. But I was desperate—this was my last chance.

"Turn round, Mary Will." I swung her about and pointed off into the fog. "Over there—don't you see——"

"See what?" she gasped.

"How I love you," I said in her ear, triumphing over the foghorn and the curiosity of the woman just beyond her. "With all my heart and soul, my dear. I'm an engineer—I say engineer—not up on sentimental stuff—can't talk it—just feel it. Give me a chance to prove how much I care. Don't you think that in time——"

She shook her head.

"What is it? Are you still fond of that other boy—the poor fellow in Shanghai?"

"No," she answered seriously. "It isn't that. I've just sort of buried him—away off in a corner of my heart. And I'm not sure that I ever did care as much as I should. On the boat coming out—I had doubts of myself—but——"

"But what?"

"Oh—can't you see? It's just as that old dowager said it would be."

"What old dowager?"

"That sharp-tongued Englishwoman who gave the dinner in Shanghai. She saw you talking and laughing with me and she said: 'I fancy he'll be just like all the other boys who are shut up in China for a few years. They think themselves madly in love with the first white girl they meet who isn't positively deformed.'"

"The old cat!"

"It was catty—but it was true. It's exactly what has happened. That's why I couldn't be so frightfully unfair to you as to seize you when this madness is on you and bind you to me for life—before you have seen your own country again, where there are millions of girls nicer than I am."

"Rot."

"No, it isn't. Go ashore and look them over. The streets of San Francisco are

filled with them. Look them over from the Golden Gate to Fifth Avenue."

"And if, after I've looked them all over, I still come back to you? Then what?"

"Then you will be a fool," laughed Mary Will.

The voice of the ship's doctor announced the end of inspection, and at once the deck was alive with an excited throng, all seeking to get somewhere else immediately. Carlotta Drew passed and called to Mary Will.

The girl held out her hand. "Good-by," she said.

"Good-by?" I took her hand perplexed. "Why do you say that? Surely we're to meet again soon."

"Why should we?" she asked.

That hurt me. I dropped her hand. "Ah, yes, why should we?" I repeated coldly.

"No reason at all. Good-by and good luck!" And Mary Will was gone.

As I sat now on my battered bags, leaning against a very damp pole in the middle of a very damp fog, it occurred to me that I had been wrong in permitting myself that moment of annoyance. I should have taken, instead, a firm uncompromising attitude. The cave-man rôle—I was quite capable of it—and it was the only way to impress girls like Mary Will. Too late now, however. She had gone from me, into the mystery of the fog. I would never see her again.

A tall slender figure loaded with baggage came and stood on the curb not two feet from where I waited. The light that struggled down from a lamp overhead revealed in blurred but unmistakable outline the flat expressionless face of Hung Chin-chung, old Henry Drew's faithful body servant. I turned, for the master could not be far behind, and sure enough the fog disgorged the dapper figure of the little millionaire. He ran smack into me.

"Why, it's young Winthrop," he cried, peering into my face. "Hello, son—I was looking for you. We've had some pretty harsh words—but there's no real reason why we shouldn't part as friends. Now, is there?"

His tone was wistful, but it made no appeal to me. No real reason? The presumptuous rascal! However, I was in no mood to quarrel.

"I'm waiting for a taxi," I said inanely.

"A taxi? You'll never get one in this fog." I suppose it was the truth. "Let us give you a lift to your hotel, my boy. We'll be delighted."

I was naturally averse to accepting favors of this man, but at that instant his wife and Mary Will emerged into our little circle of light, and I smiled at the idea of riding up-town with Mary Will, who had just dismissed me for all time. A big limousine with a light burning faintly inside slipped up to the curb, and Hung was helping the women to enter.

"Come on, my boy," pleaded old Drew.

"All right," I answered rather ungraciously, and jumped in. Drew followed, Hung piled my bags somewhere in front, and we crept off into the fog.

"Taking Mr. Winthrop to his hotel," explained Drew.

"How nice," his wife said in her cold hard voice. I looked toward Mary Will. She seemed unaware of my presence.

Like a human thing the car felt its way cautiously through the mist. About us sounded a constant symphony of automobile horns, truckmen's repartee, the clank of hoofs, the rattle of wheels. From where I sat on a little chair in front I could see the clear-cut beautiful silhouette of Carlotta Drew's face against the window, shrouded in fog. I wondered what she was thinking—this woman whose exploits had furnished the gossips of the China coast with a serial story running through many mad years. Of her first lover, perhaps; her

first husband, that gallant army man whose heart she had soon broken as she passed on her way to the arms of another. They had come and gone, the men, until, her beauty fading, she had accepted the offer of old Drew's millions, though she hated him in her heart. What a fool the old man had been! On our trip across the gossips had played once more with her rather frail reputation, linking her name with that of the ship's doctor, handsome hero of many a fleeting romance.

"Home again," chuckled old Drew. An unaccustomed gaiety seemed to have taken hold of him. "I tell you, it's good—good. This is my town. This is where I belong. The history of our family, my boy, is woven into the story of San Francisco. By the way—what I wanted to see you about—er—I want to ask a favor."

He stopped. I said nothing. A favor of me! One had to admire his nerve.

"That is—nothing much," he went on. "Only—I'm giving a little dinner party to-night. A birthday party, as a matter of fact. I'd like to have you come. One of my guests will be my partner in the mine. We can talk over that little matter of business."

"Hardly the time, or the place," I suggested.

This was like him. A gay party—plenty to eat and drink—and my affair hastily disposed of amid the general conviviality. I was not to be trapped like that.

"Well, perhaps not," he admitted. "We won't talk business, then. Just a gay little party—to brighten up the old house—to get things going in a friendly way again. Eh, Carlotta?"

"Oh, of course," said Carlotta Drew wearily.

"You'll come?" the old man insisted. I have often wondered since why he was so eager. He had wronged me, he

knew, but he was that type of man who wishes to be on friendly terms with his victim. A plentiful type.

"I'm sure Miss Mary Will wishes you to accept," he added.

"She hasn't said so," I suggested.

"It's not my birthday," said Mary Will, "nor my party."

"Not your birthday," cackled old Drew. "I should say not. But your party, I hope. Everybody's party. What do you say, my boy?"

Mary Will's indifference had maddened me, and nothing could keep me from that party now.

"I'll be delighted to come," I said firmly. It was to Drew I spoke, but my gaze was on Mary Will's scornful profile.

"That's fine!" cried the old man. He peered out the window. "Where are we? Ah, yes—Post and Grant—there's a shop near here." He seized the speaking tube and ordered his Japanese chauf-

feur to stop. "I'll be only a minute," he said as the car drew up to the curb. "Must have candles—candles for my party." And he hopped out. We stood there in the fog with the Wagnerian symphony fierce about us. It was after five now, and all San Francisco, to say nothing of Oakland and Berkeley, was stumbling home through the murk.

"Your husband seems in a gay humor to-night," I remarked to Carlotta Drew. She nodded, but said nothing. "Probably the effect of San Francisco," I went on. "I've always heard of it as a merry town. Life, and color, and romance——"

"And dozens of beautiful girls," put in Mary Will.

"I don't see them."

"Wait till the fog lifts," she answered.

Henry Drew was again at the door. He ordered the driver to stop at my hotel, then popped back into his seat. In his hand he carried a small package.

"Candles for the party," he laughed. "Fifty little pink candles."

Fifty! I stared at him there in that dim-lit car. Fifty—why, the old boy must be seventy if he was a day. Did he hope by this silly ruse to win back his middle age, in our eyes at least? Or—wait a minute! Was he only fifty, after all? If rumor were true he had lived while he lived—a wild reckless life. Perhaps that life had played a trick upon him—had made his fifty look like seventy.

We drew up before my hotel, and Hung Chin-chung was instantly on the sidewalk with my bags.

"I'll send the car for you at seven," Drew said. "We'll have a merry party. Don't fail me."

I thanked him, and amid muttered *au revoirs* the car went on its way. Standing on the curb beside an imposing carriage starter I stared after it. This was incredible! My first night back on

American soil, the night I had been dreaming of for four years—and I was to spend it celebrating the birthday of my bitterest enemy! But—there was Mary Will. She had dismissed me forever, and I was bound to show her she could not do that.

III

A FEW minutes before seven I came down-stairs into the bright lobby of my hotel. Parker, the ship's doctor, whose cabin Drew and I had shared on the way across, was lolling in a chair. He rose and came toward me, a handsome devil in evening clothes—indubitably handsome, indubitably a devil.

"All dolled up," he said.

"Going to a birthday party," I answered.

"Great Scott! You don't mean you're invited to old Drew's shindig?"

"Why shouldn't I be invited?" I asked.

"I know—but you and the old man—deadly enemies."

"Not at all. He rather likes me.

Found me so easy to flimflam—my type appeals to him. He pleaded with me to come."

"But you? You don't like him? Yet you accept. Ah, yes—I was forgetting—the little southern girl——"

"My reasons," I said hotly, "happen to be my own affair."

"Naturally." His tone was conciliatory. "Come and have a drink. No? I am going to the party myself."

I had been wondering—his fame as a philanderer was international. Was this affair with Carlotta Drew anything more than a passing flurry to relieve the tedium of another trip across? Here was the answer. Evidently it was.

"Fearful bore," he went on. "But Carlotta insisted. I'd do anything for Carlotta Drew. Wonderful woman!"

"Think so?" said I.

"Don't you?" he asked.

"In the presence of an expert," said I, "I would hesitate to express an opinion."

He laughed.

"Er—you know something of old Drew's affairs," he ventured. "Must be a very rich man?"

"Must be," said I.

"That mine you worked in? Big money maker?"

"Big money maker." I repeated his words intentionally. He was frank, at any rate. What cruel thoughts were stirring behind those green eyes? Henry Drew out of the way, Carlotta with the added charm of millions——

"But he's only fifty," I said as unkindly as I could.

"Only fifty?"

"Sure—the party," I explained.

Parker shook his head.

"Looks more than fifty to me," he said quite hopefully.

Hung Chin-chung, a strange figure in that Occidental lobby, stood suddenly before me, bowing low. Drew's car was waiting, he said.

"Want to ride up with me?" I inquired of Parker.

"Er—no, thanks. I'll drop in later. Have some matters to attend to. So long!"

He headed for the bar, where the matters no doubt awaited his attention. I accompanied the Chinaman out of the lobby and once more entered the Drew limousine. Followed the faint whir of an expensive motor, and again we were abroad in the fog-bound street.

The traffic so much in evidence at five o'clock was no more, the grumbling symphony was stilled, and only the doubtful honk-honk of an occasional automobile broke the silence. Inside the car the light was no longer on, and I sat in a most oppressive darkness. Almost immediately we began to ascend a very steep incline. Nob Hill, no doubt, famous in the history of this romantic, climbing town. Eagerly I pressed my face against the pane beside me, but the

tule-fog still blotted out the city of my dreams.

At one corner we grazed the side of some passing vehicle, and loud curses filled the air. I found the switch and flooded the interior of the car with light. It fell on the gray upholstery, on the silver handles of the doors. I was reminded of something—something unpleasant. Ah, yes—a coffin. I switched off the light again.

After a ride of some twenty minutes we drew up beside the curb, and Hung stood waiting for me at the door. Back of him was vaguely outlined a monster of a house, with yellow lights fighting their way through the tule-fog from many windows.

"The end of our journey," said Hung. "If you will deign to come, please."

I followed him up many steps. Henry Drew must have heard us, for he was waiting in the doorway.

"Fine! Fine!" cried the old man.

"Delighted to see you. Come right in. The house is a bit musty—been closed for a long time."

It was musty. Though I came from the clammy gloom of a tule-fog, though many lights were blazing inside, I was struck at once with a feeling of chill and staleness and age. Open or closed, I thought, this house would always be musty, with the accumulation of many years. For it was very old, it had escaped the fire, and here it stood with its memories, waiting for the wrecker, Time, to write *Finis* to its history.

"Hung—take Mr. Winthrop's hat and coat." Old Drew seized me almost affectionately by the arm. "You come with me." He was like a small boy celebrating his first real birthday party. He led me into a library lined with dusty books. From the walls, San Francisco Drews, blond and brunette, lean and fat, old and young, looked down on us. "Take that chair by the fire, my boy."

I sat down. There was something depressing in the air, there was much that was pathetic about Henry Drew. His birthday! Who gave a hang? Certainly not his wife, who looked at him through eyes that seemed to be counting his years with ever-increasing hate; nor, probably, the son by his first marriage, whom I had never seen, but who, according to report, hated him too.

He went over and held those cold transparent hands of his up to the fire. I noticed that they trembled slightly.

"The girls will be down soon," he said. "Before they come I want to tell you that I've been thinking over our little matter——"

"Please," I interrupted. "I'm sure your party will go off much more pleasantly if there is no mention of that." I paused. "My lawyer will call on you to-morrow."

The shadow of a smile crossed his face. And well he might smile, for he

knew that I was bluffing; I had no lawyer; I had, in fact, no case against him.

"You're quite right, my boy," he said. "To-night is no time for business. Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow—to-morrow I see your lawyer."

He laughed outright now, an unkind sneering laugh, and once more hatred of him blazed in my heart. Why had I been such a fool as to come?

The door-bell rang, a loud peal, and Drew ran to the hall, where Hung Chin-chung was already opening the outer door. Through the curtains I saw a huge rosy-cheeked policeman outlined against the fog.

"Hello, Mr. Drew," he said cheerily.

"Hello, Riley," cried the old man. Running forward he seized the policeman's hand. "I'm back again."

"And glad I am to see you," said Riley. "I knew the house was closed, and seein' all the lights I thought I'd look in and make sure was everything O. K."

"We landed late to-day," replied Drew. "Everything is certainly O. K. You'll see plenty of lights here from now on."

He stood on the threshold, chatting gaily with the patrolman. Hung Chin-chung came into the library where I sat, and taking up a log stooped to put it on the fire. The flicker of light played on his face, old, lined, yellow like a lemon left too long in the ice-chest, and glinted in those dark inscrutable little eyes.

Drew sent Riley on his way with a genial word and returned to the library. Hung stood awaiting him, evidently about to speak.

"Yes, yes—what is it?" Drew asked.

"With your permission," said Hung, "I will go to my room."

"All right," Drew answered. "But be back here in half an hour. You're to serve dinner, you know."

"I will serve it," said Hung, and went noiselessly out.

"What was I saying?" Drew turned to me. "Ah, yes—the girls—the girls will be down in a minute. Bless them! That little Mary Will—like a breath of springtime from her own mountains. Ah, youth—youth! All I have gained, all that I have—I'd swap it to-night for youth. My boy, you don't know what you've got."

I stared at him. "He'll steal your shirt, and you'll beg him to take the pants too." Thus inelegantly had old Drew been described to me in China, and there was some truth in it, surely. Where was my hatred of a moment ago? Confound it, there was something likable about him after all.

I stared at him no longer, for now outside the curtains I could see Mary Will coming down the stairs. Many beautiful women had come down those stairs in the days when social history was making in that old house on Nob Hill—women whose loveliness was now

but a fast-fading memory on peeling canvas. But none, I felt quite certain, was fairer than Mary Will. The lights shone softly on her red-brown hair and on those white shoulders that were youth incarnate. She was wearing—well, I can't describe it, but it was unquestionably the very dress she should have worn. Thank God she had it and had put it on! She came into the library, and the gloom and staleness fled, conquered, from the room.

"My dear—my dear!" Henry Drew met her, his eyes alight with admiration. "You are a picture, and no mistake. You carry me back—indeed you do—back to the time when these rooms were alive with youth and beauty." He waved a hand to the portrait of a woman in the post of honor above the fireplace. "You are very like her. My first wife, you know." He stood for a moment, pathetic, unhappy, weighed down by the years, more human than I had ever seen

A Warner Bros. Talking Picture. *The Agony Column, Photoplay Title The Second Floor Mystery.*

GEOFFREY IS SELECTED BY THE ANARCHISTS TO SET OFF THE BOMB THAT WILL KILL THE JAIL GUARDS.

him before. "I don't imagine you two will object to being left alone," he said finally, attempting a smile. "I'm going to have a look at the table. Want everything just right." He crossed the hall and disappeared.

"Well, Mary Will—here I am," I announced.

"Sure enough," smiled Mary Will.

"This afternoon," said I, "at four o'clock, you put me out of your life forever. Twice since then I've popped back. And I'll go on popping, and popping, until you're a sweet gray-haired old lady, so you might as well take me and have done."

"Too bad," mused Mary Will, "about the fog. If you could have seen all those other girls——"

"Don't want to see them," I said firmly. "Tell me, how do you like it here in the family vault?"

She shuddered.

"It's a bit oppressive. I'm going to

strike out for myself to-morrow. Mr. Drew gave me a check to-night—I can live on that until I get a job."

"The cost of living is frightfully high."

"But worth it—don't you think?" she asked.

"With you—undoubtedly."

"You just keep going round in circles," she complained.

"You've got me going round in circles," I laughed. I came close to her before the fire. "Mary Will—I've never been in San Francisco before. And I've never been married. Two new experiences. I'd like to tackle them together. To-morrow, after the fog lifts, and I've seen and rejected all the other girls, I'll meet you with a license in my pocket."

"Oh, dear—you are so sudden."

"It's girls like you that make men sudden."

"I never gave you any encouragement, I'm sure," she protested.

"You let me look at you. Encouragement enough."

"Look at me—and pity me."

"Now don't start that. It's love!"

"No—pity."

"Love, I tell you."

This might have gone on indefinitely, but suddenly Carlotta Drew's voice broke in, calling, and Mary Will fled, just as I had nearly got her hand. She fled, and that dim room was instantly old and stale again.

I stood alone with the past. My thoughts were most jumbled, chaotic. Drews—Drews innumerable—were looking down at me, wondering, perhaps, about this stranger who dared make love in the very room where they themselves had laughed and loved in the old far days. Wonderful days that glittered with the gold men were extracting from California's soil. Gone now, forever. And lovely ladies, turned to dust. Ugh—unpleasant thought! Look

at the windows. Need washing, don't they? Or is it the heavy yellow fog from the tule-fields, pressing close against the panes, trying to get in? Quiet—oppressively quiet—what has become of everybody? No sound save the slow deliberate clicking of the big clock in the hallway. The voice of Time, who had conquered all these people on the wall. "I'll-get—you-too. "I'll-get—you-too." Was the clock really saying that? All right—some day, perhaps—but not yet. Now I had youth. "My boy, you don't know what you've got." Oh, yes, I do. Youth—and Mary Will. She, too, must be mine. She had looked wonderful. Where was she? Was I to be left alone forever with the confounded clock?

Suddenly from across the hall came a cry, sharp, uncanny, terrible. I ran out in the direction from which it had come and stood on the threshold of the Drew dining-room. Another room of many memories, of stern faces on the wall. A

table was set with gleaming silver and white linen, and in its center stood a cake, on which fifty absurd pink candles flickered bravely.

There appeared to be no one in the room. On the other side of the table a French window stood open to the fog, and I went around to investigate. I had taken perhaps a dozen steps when I stopped, appalled.

Old Drew was lying on the carpet, and one yellow lean hand, always so adept at reaching out and seizing, held a corner of the white table-cloth. There was a dark stain on the left side of his dress coat; and when I pulled the coat back I saw on the otherwise spotless linen underneath a great red circle that grew and grew. He was quite dead.

I stood erect, and for a dazed uncertain moment I stared about the room. Beside me, on the table, fifty yellow points of flame trembled like human things terrified at what they had seen.

IV

As I stood there with Henry Drew's dead body at my feet and those silly candles flaring wanly at my side, I heard the big clock in the hallway strike the half-hour, and then the scurry of feet on the stairs. Cleared now of its first amazement, my mind was unusually keen. Henry Drew done for at last! By whom? Again my eye fell upon the open French window, and stepping to it I looked out. My heart stopped beating—for amid the shadows and the fog I thought I saw a blacker shadow, which passed in the twinkling of an eye.

I stepped quickly from the room. The light from the window at my back penetrated a few feet only on a narrow

veranda, from which steps led down—into a garden, I judged. It was unexplored country to me, the dark was impenetrable, but I stepped off into tall damp grass almost to my knees.

The tule-fog seemed glad to have me back. Its clammy embrace was about my ankles; from the bare branches of the trees above, it dripped down on my defenseless head. I took several steps to the right, and ran into an unexpected ell of the house. As I stood there, uncertain which way to go, something brushed against my face, something rough, uncanny, that sent a shiver down my spine. Wildly I swung my arms in all directions, but they touched only empty air and fog.

Still swinging my arms, stumbling amid flower-beds, hunting in vain for a path, I continued to explore. My feet caught in a tangle of vines and I came near sprawling on the wet grass. Righting myself with difficulty I stopped and

looked about me. The light from the room I had left was no longer visible. I was lost in a jungle that was only the Drew back yard. For a moment I stood tense and silent. How I knew it I can not say, but I was conscious that I was not alone. Close at hand some human creature waited, holding its breath, alert, prepared. I did not see, I did not hear—I felt. Suddenly I lunged in the direction where I imagined it to be—and instantly my intuition was proved correct. I heard some one back away, and then quick heavy footsteps crunching on a gravel walk.

He had shown me the path, and for that I thanked him. Following as speedily as I could in his wake I came to a gate in the high wall at the rear. It was swinging open. Through this, no doubt, the murderer had gone, and I stepped out into the alley. I could see no one; there was no sound whatever. Then I started and almost cried aloud—but it

was only an alley cat brushing against my legs.

My quarry had vanished into the fog, and to look for him would be to hunt the proverbial needle in the good old haystack. It came to me then that I had been all kinds of a fool, rushing out of the Drew house like that at the moment of my gruesome discovery. I had not meant to come so far, of course—but here I was, and there was nothing to do but hurry back. How about Mary Will? Had she, perhaps, been the second person to enter the dining-room, and been frightened half to death by what she found there?

I swung on my heel to reenter the garden—and at that instant the gate banged shut in my face. The wind? Nonsense, there was no wind. With a sickening sense of being tricked I put my hand on the knob. I turned and pushed. As I expected, the gate was securely locked on the inside.

What should I do now? Wait here at the gate, holding my friend of the fog a prisoner inside? Useless, I reflected; there must be many ways of escape—a neighbor's yard on either side. Before I had waited five minutes he would be well on his way to safety. No—I must get back to the house as quickly as I could. Since I could not return by way of the garden only one course remained—I must follow the alley until I came to a cross-street, then travel that until I came to the street where Henry Drew's house stood. But what was the name of the street where it stood? All at once I realized that I hadn't the faintest idea. No matter, I must get back to that front door somehow. A short distance down an alley lamp made an odd shape in the fog. I hurried toward it. Just beyond I stepped out into the cross-street, and paused. Left or right? Left, of course.

The clammy yellow fog stuck closer

than a brother. On my feet I wore patent leather pumps, recently purchased on my return to human society in Shanghai. Their soles were almost as they had left the shop, and I slipped and skidded unmercifully on the damp sidewalk. A small matter—but one that somehow filled me with a feeling of helplessness and rage. What a spectacle I must present! Served me right, though. I had no business at Henry Drew's confounded party.

As best I could I hurried on, staring at the house-fronts. But their owners couldn't have told them apart in the mist. My search was hopeless. I had given up and was standing beneath a street lamp, when I heard footsteps.

Debonairly out of the fog walked Parker, the ship's doctor, humming a tune as he walked. He stopped and stared at me. A fine sight I must have been, too—wild-eyed, with evening clothes, no overcoat, no hat.

"Good lord, Winthrop!" he said. "What's happened to you?"

There was no friendliness in his tone, and it came to me suddenly—a sickening premonition—that this was the last man it was good for me to meet just now. I resolved to make the best of my plight.

"Parker, a terrible thing has happened. Old man Drew has been murdered."

"You don't say? Who killed him?"

"I don't know. How the devil should I?" His cool unconcerned tones maddened me. "I had reached the house, and was waiting for him in the library. Hearing a cry, I ran into the dining-room. He was there—dead—on the floor."

"Really? And now you are wildly running the streets. Hunting for a policeman, perhaps?"

I was not unaware of the sneering implication in his words, but I strove to keep my temper.

"I'm trying to get back to the house," I said calmly. "As I was standing beside the old man's body I saw some one moving outside an open window."

I outlined briefly the series of small adventures that had followed. He heard me out, then tossed away his cigarette, and I saw a faint smile on his cruel face. It occurred to me that I would have to repeat my story—repeat it again and again—and that I was destined to see that smile of unbelief on other faces.

"Very interesting," said Parker, still smiling. "I wish I could be of some help, old man. But as a matter of fact I'm in the same fix as you. I started to walk to the house, and lost my way."

"At any rate," I answered, "you must know the address."

"Don't you?" He laughed loudly. "I say, that's funny."

"To you, perhaps," I said.

"Pardon me. My sense of humor breaks out at most unseemly times. I

do know the address, of course. The house is on California Street." He mentioned a number.

"There are no street signs on the lamps," I said.

"No. But at each corner the name of the street is carved in the sidewalk. Let's try that."

We walked along to the nearest crossing. Neither of us had a match; but by stooping and running his fingers along the damp walk Parker came upon the name carved in the stone. I leaned over beside him, and we began to spell it out. It was in such a silly posture that Riley the policeman found us as his big bulk emerged from the fog.

"What the hell?" said Riley, not without reason.

"It's Riley!" I cried. "Good enough!"

"Who are you?" he wanted to know.

"A friend of Mr. Drew," I told him. "I was there a while ago when you called to see if everything was O. K."

"Sure," he said. "You was sitting in the library."

"Of course. Riley—Mr. Drew has been murdered."

"Murdered! He can't be. I was just talkin' to him."

I told him of the events since his call at the Drew house, and repeated the lame story of my actions following my discovery of the crime. He made no comment.

"How about you?" he said, turning to Parker.

"I met this young man by chance," Parker told him. "I was on my way to Mr. Drew's house, where I had been invited for dinner, and I became confused in the fog."

Riley shook his head.

"I don't mind sayin' you both sound fishy to me," he remarked. "We'll go back to the house. You lads follow me—wait a bit. Second thoughts is best. You lead the way."

He pointed with his night stick, and meekly we set out. Riley pounded along at our heels. We must have been far afield for we walked some distance, passing several corners where motor-cars honked dubiously. At last Riley halted us before the Drew house, and we climbed the steps. Finding the door unlocked we entered, with Riley close behind.

V

THE life of the Drew household appeared to be at the moment centered in the great hall into which we came. Carlotta Drew was lying back on a big sofa at the left, indulging in the luxury of mild hysterics, and Mary Will bent over her, a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand. A little old woman with a kindly face, evidently a servant, was weeping silently near the stairs, and at the moment of our entrance Hung Chin-chung emerged from the dining-room with no sign of emotion on his inscrutable face.

"Mary Will," I said gently.

She lifted her head and looked at me. There was terror in her eyes, but at sight

of me it appeared to give way to an intense relief.

"You've come back," she said, as though in surprise. "Oh—I'm so glad you've come back."

At the moment I did not understand the full meaning of her words. Carlotta Drew sat up at sight of Doctor Parker and abandoned her mechanical exhibition of grief. Perhaps she remembered the effect of tears on even the most careful make-up.

"Now, what's it all about?" boomed Riley. "Mrs. MacShane——" He turned to the old servant.

"The poor man!" wept Mrs. MacShane. "In there—in the dining-room——"

"Has any wan called the station?"

"Sure, I called 'em," said the old woman, evidently efficient even under stress.

"They'll be sendin' a detective over," said Riley. "No wan leaves—that's understood."

He passed on into the tragic room where the candles were burning. Hurrying to Mary Will's side I began once more the tale of my adventures since my finding of the millionaire's body. As I spoke in a low voice I thought she looked at me in an odd way. My heart sank. Was even Mary Will going to doubt my story?

Riley returned.

"It's hard to realize, Mrs. MacShane," he said. "He was a kind man—you know that. Many's the time, on cold nights, he had me in from the misty streets for a drop—but no matter."

There was a brisk knock at the front door and a figure muffled in a huge coat stepped into the hall. Close behind came two policemen in uniform. At sight of the figure leading the way Riley was all respect.

"Sergeant Barnes—you are needed here," he said.

"Yes!"

The voice of Detective Sergeant Barnes rang out sharp and alive and vital in that house of dim shadows and far memories. He slipped off coat and hat and tossed them down on a chair. I saw that he was a cool, quick little man, bald of head, unsympathetic of eye, business from the word go.

"Henry Drew?" he snapped.

Riley nodded. "In the dining-room—about forty minutes ago," he said.

"Myers!" Detective Barnes turned to one of the uniformed men. "You take the front. Murphy—the back door for you." The two men left for their posts. Barnes stood, staring about the room. "Drew had a son. Mark Drew—lawyer—Athletic Club. I don't see him here."

"He's on his way, sir," said Mrs. MacShane. "I called him. Sure, I thought of him right away, though why I did I don't know, for not in five years has he set foot in this house——"

"All right," the detective cut her short.

He was still studying that odd little group: Parker, sneering, unmoved; Carlotta Drew, shaken a bit in the face of a consummation she had no doubt long desired; Mary Will, young and innocent and lovely; the old Irish woman with the tears still wet on her cheeks; and the yellow Chinaman standing patient as a beast of burden by the stairs. And finally he looked at me, whose enemy lay low at last beside the fifty candles.

"No one leaves this house until I have completed my investigation," he announced. "You stay here, Riley, and see to that."

"Yes, sir," said Riley, with a determined look about our circle. Sergeant Barnes strode into the dining-room.

"A merry party—to brighten up the old house—to get things going in a friendly way again." The words of the old millionaire spoken in his car as we rode up-town came back to me. How

different, this, from the party Henry Drew had planned! No one spoke. Each sat wrapped in gloomy thought under the glare of Riley. Only one sound broke the stillness—the voice of Time in the person of the clock, still ticking its eternal threat.

Mary Will sat not three feet from me, but I had the feeling that she was miles away. Some sudden barrier seemed to have arisen between us. She glanced toward me but seldom, and when she did it was with a look in her eyes I did not like to see. I was glad when the loud peal of the door-bell broke the stillness of the room.

Mrs. MacShane opened the door, and a brisk good-looking man of about thirty-five came in. The old woman's first words identified him.

"Oh, Mr. Mark," she cried. "Your poor father!"

So this was Mark Drew. There was none of that shrewd wicked cunning

that was his father's in his eyes as he gazed frankly about the room. His face was a pleasant one, wrinkled with the evidence of much smiling. No wonder this man and his cruel old father had come in time to the parting of the ways.

Carlotta Drew stepped forward and held out her hand. "I am Carlotta. Your father's wife. We have never met."

He made no move to take her hand.

"I have heard about you," he said gravely, and moved on, leaving her standing foolishly with her hand outstretched.

The wave of hatred that passed over her face was not pretty to see, but she tossed her head and with a hard little laugh resumed her seat. Mark Drew went on instinctively into the dining-room, and we heard his voice and that of the detective as they conversed together. Then the voices grew fainter, a window slammed; they had moved on into the garden.

After an interval Drew and the detective came back into the hall. The former sat down, his face in his hands, and Barnes stood in the center of our group playing with a little pack of white cards in his hand.

"Well—let's get acquainted," he began. "How many of you were in the house when this thing happened?"

All save Parker admitted their presence.

"Was there any noise—any sound—from that room?"

"Yes," I told him. "There was a cry—a sharp, rather terrible scream. I was in the library, waiting for—er—him. I ran into the dining-room. The table was set—the cake with fifty candles on it."

Mark Drew raised his head. "Sergeant, in regard to those fifty candles——" he began.

"Yes," said Barnes. "Let that pass for now. You—go on. You went into the room. You were the first to enter."

"Undoubtedly. Mr. Drew was lying on the floor on the other side of the table, not far from the open window. He was dead—stabbed just below the heart."

"Did you notice a knife—or any other weapon?"

"I didn't look for one. The open window caught my eye, and when I stepped to it I thought I saw some one in the garden."

The moment I had been dreading had come, and I pulled myself together. Once more I must relate my story, and this time the manner of its acceptance was vital to me. I told of the figure in the garden, the footsteps on the gravel, the gate that had been slammed and locked behind me. I pictured myself lost in the fog, trying to return to the house. Though I put forth every effort to make it sound reasonable, it didn't; it sounded silly, preposterous. I felt Mary Will's eyes upon me. The detective gave no sign.

"Before I ask you how you got back here," he said, "I want to say—I don't get you. Who are you? What's your position here? A friend of Henry Drew?"

"Decidedly not. I was an employee."

"Decidedly not? What do you mean by that?"

"If I may speak," drawled Carlotta Drew. She stared at me between narrowed lids, cold, calculating, hostile. "If I may speak, I think I can throw some light on that. This young man was employed by my husband in the Yunnan mines, and he claimed he had been unfairly treated. There was some cock-and-bull story about a promise——"

"There was a promise," I said, "and it was no cock-and-bull story."

"He had quarreled violently with my husband, who dismissed him."

"That's not true," I said. "I resigned."

"By chance they occupied the same cabin on the boat coming from China,

along with Doctor Parker here," the woman went on. "I believe the quarreling continued." She looked questioningly at Parker.

"It did," the doctor said. "For several days after they came aboard. I'll swear to that. Then they stopped speaking to each other."

"And yet"—Barnes turned to me—"you were a guest at dinner?"

"Yes," I said. "I believe that for some reason Drew wanted to smooth the matter out. He suggested I come here to meet his partner in the mines, Doctor Su Yen Hun, a Chinese merchant in this town. I agreed to come, but I told him I'd rather not discuss business."

"If you didn't want to talk business, why did you come?"

"I came because——" I stopped. But I was resolved to tell the truth from start to finish. "I came because I wished to see again Mrs. Drew's companion, Miss Tellfair."

The detective's eyes followed mine and rested on Mary Will. "Huh! You're interested in the young lady?"

"I've asked her to marry me," I told him.

"Yeah. You admit, then, that there had been bad blood between you and Henry Drew over business matters? You claim he cheated you?"

"I do."

"We left you wandering in the fog, trying to get back to this house, you say. You got back. How?"

"I met this gentleman—Doctor Parker. He had been invited here to dinner and was walking up from his hotel. He claimed that he, too, was lost."

"Doctor Parker?" Barnes turned and surveyed him.

"Yes," said the doctor, smiling his devilishly mean smile. "I met this young man wandering in the fog. I must say he had a wild look about him—but that, of course, is unimportant. Truth com-

pels me to add that he was going at a rather rapid gait away from the house."

"How did you know, if you were lost yourself?" Barnes asked.

"It was later proved when we met Officer Riley and he showed us the way."

I saw the eyes of Parker and Carlotta Drew meet then, and I knew without further proof that a partnership had been formed to fasten this crime on me, if possible. But why? There could be but one reason, and I was startled as it flashed into my mind. Where was Doctor Parker at a little before seven-thirty? Lost in the fog—alone.

Detective Barnes turned again to Carlotta Drew.

"Now, Mrs. Drew," he began, "please tell me what you were doing at half past seven o'clock?"

"I was in my room, dressing for dinner," she said. "Miss Tellfair, my companion, was with me. I have no maid at present, and I had called her up

to assist me with some troublesome hooks in the back. We were together there when we heard the cry."

"You heard a cry. What then?"

"My heart stood still. I tried to speak, but I couldn't."

Mary Will turned suddenly and faced her.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "Your memory is slightly at fault. You had no difficulty in speaking. In fact, you spoke distinctly."

"Nonsense! I don't remember."

"I do," replied Mary Will firmly. "You said quite clearly, 'He's done it! He's done it!' You said it twice."

"He's done it?" repeated Barnes. "Just what, Mrs. Drew, did you mean by that?"

"If I said it at all," answered Carlotta Drew icily, "which I doubt, I do not know what I meant. I was beside myself with terror."

"But why should you be beside your-

self with terror, as you say? You had no means of knowing what that cry meant."

"I knew only too well. My dear husband's life had been threatened—only recently, as a matter of fact—by Mr. Winthrop here."

"I deny that," said I.

"Did you hear Mr. Winthrop threaten your husband—my father?" asked Mark Drew sharply.

"No-o," said the woman. "Not precisely. But Henry—Mr. Drew—had told me he was afraid of Mr. Winthrop. He was very much upset when he found himself in the same stateroom with him. He tried to be moved."

"Then when you cried out 'He's done it,'" suggested Doctor Parker, "you were—almost unconsciously—thinking of Winthrop?"

"That must have been it."

"Doctor—you're invaluable," said Mark Drew with a strange smile.

"Come, come!" broke in Barnes. "Let's get on. You heard the cry?"

"Miss Tellfair ran out of the room," went on Carlotta Drew.

"I started to," corrected Mary Will, the color rising in her white cheeks. "But you held me back. You clung to me——"

"I tell you I was beside myself. I didn't know what I was doing."

"You take it up," suggested Barnes to Mary Will.

"I managed to get away," Mary Will said, "and ran down-stairs. I looked in the library; it was empty. The dining-room door was open. I went in——"

"You were, then, the second person to enter the room?"

"Very likely." Mary Will's voice was low now—little more than a whisper. "I thought the room empty at first. The window stood open. I went round the table, and there—on the floor—I saw him—Mr. Drew."

"Yes—go on."

"I—I screamed and ran from the room."

"Ah, yes!" said Barnes. "Did you by any chance see a weapon of any sort—a knife—near Mr. Drew's body?"

"I scarcely looked," answered Mary Will, her lovely eyes full on the detective's face. "I was so frightened, you understand—"

"Of course, of course. No matter," Barnes said. "You screamed and ran from the room."

"Yes. In the doorway I met Mrs. MacShane. Mrs. Drew was coming down the stairs. She followed Mrs. MacShane into the dining-room. In a moment she, too, screamed—and I believe she fainted in Mrs. MacShane's arms."

"It was almost a faint," said the old woman.

"Miss Tellfair, please," Barnes insisted.

"I knew where Mrs. Drew kept a bottle of smelling-salts," Mary Will continued.

"She had used them on the boat, and I'd packed them for her. I ran up and got them—and brought them down. That's—that's all, I think." I fancied that Mary Will was near a faint herself.

"And now, Mrs. MacShane," said the detective, "we'll listen to you."

"Officer—my story's soon told," said the old woman. "I hears the cry, and bein' busy with dinner, ordered at the last minute, as ye might say, I didn't pay no attention. I'm no cook, I'm a caretaker, an' I was doin' the cookin' as a favor to poor Mr. Drew, who sint me the word by wireless to-day, I havin' looked afther the house while he was away. 'Sure,' says I, 'that's a keen cry, an' a bitter wan, but my business is here.' Thin I got to thinkin', so I took a minute to come trottin' in; afther that it was as the young lady says. I found what I found—poor Mr. Drew—God rist his soul!"

The quick eye of Barnes once more traveled around that little group.

"Doctor Parker, I believe, was lost in the fog at half past seven, on his way to the house," he said. "That leaves nobody but this stony-faced Chink. I'd as soon go out in the Sahara Desert and have a chat with the Sphinx as question one of 'em. Come here, you!"

Hung Chin-chung stiffened, and a dignity that was ever part of him shone from his strange eyes as he crossed the room and stood before the detective.

"What's your name?" roared Barnes. He was one of those Americans who believe all foreigners are deaf.

Hung stared at him in amiable contempt. Mark Drew spoke up.

"If I may make a suggestion," he said, "Hung was almost one of the family. He was my father's body-servant, for twenty years his best friend, and in these later years, I am afraid, his only friend. Hung's personal name, Chin-chung, means completely loyal, and he was all of that. He has never been known to re-

fuse any request my father made of him, and I am sure my father was extremely fond of him. So was Hung fond of my father, and I am very much mistaken, if, despite the lack of evidence in his face, Hung is not the sincerest mourner among us here to-night."

The Chinaman bowed.

"It is sweet indeed," he said, in precise perfect English, "if I have found such honor in the eyes of my employer's son. You are a policeman," he added, turning gravely on Barnes, "and you wish to know of my movements in this house to-night. When this matter under discussion was in progress I was in my room, whither I had gone with my master's permission. This young man"—he nodded toward me—"was in the room when that permission was granted."

"That's right," I said.

"I am no butler, no house man," Hung went on. "But we had only to-day ar-

rived from China, and there was not yet time to engage a servant of that class. Mr. Drew had asked me to serve the dinner to-night, and I had agreed to do so, as I agreed to all his wishes, always. I was in my room making certain changes in my attire, that I might bring honor to my master and my master's house in the eyes of his friends."

"Did you hear anything?"

"My room," said Hung, "is on the fourth floor, at the rear. No sound of any disturbance reached my ears. I came down, prepared to serve dinner, and found the house in an uproar. My master, who was as dear to me as the bones of my honorable ancestors, was dead beside the table where dinner was prepared."

"There's a back stairs?" suggested Barnes.

"Ah, yes," replied Hung, "a back stairs, leading through the kitchen of Mrs. MacShane. If I had passed that way——"

"He didn't," said the old woman. "I never left the kitchen from five this afternoon till I come in here. I saw nothing of Hung. He speaks the truth."

Barnes stood staring at Hung through his vivid little eyes, but the beady eyes of the Chinaman gave back no answering gleam. Still the detective played with the pack of white cards in his hand.

"We're getting nowhere," pouted Carlotta Drew. "I must say I feel faint and weak. Surely we may be excused now."

"Not yet!" snapped Barnes. "I'm sorry. I believe you've had no dinner. If Mrs. MacShane here could make us all a cup of coffee——"

"I can that," said Mrs. MacShane.

"Go and help," said Barnes to Hung, and the latter, after a moment of open defiance, turned slowly on his velvet-shod feet and followed the old woman to the kitchen.

Barnes stood in deep thought, looking from one to another of the group that re-

mained. His eye as it met mine was cold and calculating, and I knew that if he could fix a semblance of guilt on my head he would do it.

A man prominent in San Francisco life was murdered, there would be an outcry in the newspapers, and an arrest must be made to save the face of the police—the guilty man if possible; if not, some one who seemed guilty.

"Let's go back," he said with sudden decision. "Henry Drew was giving a birthday party to-night. I noticed, Mr. Drew, that when you saw the cake with the fifty candles you appeared surprised. I take it this was not your father's birthday."

"It most certainly was not," Mark Drew replied. "If you will consult the family Bible in the library you will find that my father was born, not in December but in March. He was sixty-nine years old last March."

"Sixty-nine," mused Barnes. "Yet

this was somebody's fiftieth birthday—somebody Henry Drew thought highly enough of to honor with a party. Whose birthday was it? Mrs. Drew—do you know?"

"I do not," said Carlotta Drew. "My husband confided few of his affairs to me."

"Yes? Well, I guess we can take it for granted that the person in whose honor the party was given was to be among the guests." Barnes held up the little pack of white cards. "I've got here the place cards for the party, which I gathered up from the table." He began to read. "Mr. Winthrop—you're not fifty. Miss Tellfair—I don't need to ask. Doctor Parker—er—how about you?"

"Not guilty," Parker said. "It's not my birthday, and Mr. Drew wouldn't have given me a party if it were."

Barnes held up another card, and for a long moment gazed at the face of Carlotta Drew. He must have seen the lines

and wrinkles that even the best of make-ups could not completely hide.

"If you will pardon me, Mrs. Drew—"

"I have already told you," answered Carlotta Drew angrily, "I do not know whose birthday it is."

"Well, no offense," smiled Barnes. "That leaves me just one card—the card of the guest who for some reason or other has not come to the party, Doctor Su Yen Hun. The other partner in the Yunnan mine, I believe."

"So I understand," said I.

"Do you know him?"

"I met him four years ago—in Shanghai."

"He was a partner in the fraud you claim was practised on you?"

"I understand he was a partner in all of Drew's shady deals."

"An interesting guest. I'd like to see him." Barnes turned to the patrolman, who was still waiting. "Riley, before I let you go back to your beat, do this for

me. Go to Su Yen Hun's house—you know, the big Chinese millionaire—it's just round the corner on Post Street. Give Su my compliments and ask him to step over here a minute."

"Yes, sir," said Riley, and promptly disappeared.

"I can tell you in advance—this is not Su's fiftieth birthday," Mark Drew said. "He's a very old man—eighty or more."

"I know he is," Barnes answered, "but he's worth a question or two anyhow. Now while you people are waiting for your coffee I'll have a look about the up-stairs." He paused at the foot of the stairway. "Myers is in front, and Murphy's in the garden," he smiled. "Good men, both of them. So keep your seats."

As the detective walked briskly up the stairs I was startled to see Mary Will's eyes following him, wide and frightened. I went quickly to her side, but before I could speak Doctor Parker cut in.

"That is an outrage!" he cried. He rose

and walked angrily up and down. "Why should I be held here? I came to this house for a party, not an inquest. When that fool detective comes back I'm going to demand that he let me go."

Mark Drew answered in a low, surprisingly hostile tone. "I would not call that fool detective's attention to myself if I were you."

"What do you mean by that?" snarled Parker, turning on him.

"Lost in the fog," smiled Drew. "Not much of an alibi, Doctor, if you ask me."

"Do you dare to insinuate——"

"That you would injure my father? When have you ever done anything else?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, don't you? I mean you are too eager, my dear Doctor—you and this woman here—to fasten the crime on the head of a young man who may or may not be guilty. Don't think you can fool

me. Don't think I can't read you—the pair of you. You have made the last years of my father's life a hell. And what does his death mean to you? This woman with a big share of my father's money—and no more need of secrecy. Take care, Doctor Parker. Lie low. I'm telling you—the fog is a rotten alibi."

"You're a lawyer," Parker cried. "You know I could have you in court for talk like that."

"Don't worry," said Drew. "Before this affair is ended you'll have me in court—or I'll have you!"

They faced each other, evidently on the verge of blows. But over Drew's shoulder Doctor Parker caught a look from the eyes of Carlotta Drew, and backing away he stepped to the window. I turned to Mary Will. She seemed to have heard nothing; her gaze had never left the head of the stairs.

"Mary Will—what is it—what's the matter?" I said softly.

"Oh—go away—please go away!" she whispered. "They mustn't see us talking together—now."

Without question I did as she asked. But I was filled with amazement. How was Mary Will involved in the murder of Henry Drew?

VI

While Detective Barnes was up-stairs fifteen or twenty minutes passed, duly recorded by the busy clock in the hall. Gloomy with foreboding, I sat staring at a Chinese print on the wall. It was a cheery little thing, representing an execution. I wondered about the most vitally interested party, who appeared to have completely lost his head. Was he guilty? Or had he, an innocent man, been caught up in a net of circumstantial evidence while the real culprit went free? It was for me a most interesting question.

The bald little detective was coming down the stairs. His face was very serious; he held one hand behind his back. Mary Will was staring at him,

fascinated, and to my surprise he walked straight up to her.

"If you don't mind, Miss Tellfair," he said, "we will go back to your story for a moment."

"Yes," breathed Mary Will. All color was gone from her face.

"Your room up-stairs—it's the blue room to the left, on the second floor?"

"It is."

"When you went up to get the smelling-salts for Mrs. Drew—you took the time to go first to your own room—didn't you?"

"I—I did."

"You wanted to hide something?"

"Yes."

"Something you had picked up from the side of the dead man in the dining-room?" Mary Will nodded; her face was the color of that tablecloth old Drew had seized in his last moment of life. "You don't seem to be up on this sort of thing, my girl," Barnes went on. "Under

your mattress was a pretty obvious place."

He brought his hand round from behind his back, and when I saw what the hand held I had difficulty repressing the cry that rose to my lips. For the detective held a small Chinese knife, with a handle of grape jade, carved in the shape of some heathen god. It was unique, that knife, there could hardly be another like it in the world. I had bought it from a merchant far in the interior of China, and on the boat coming over I had shown it to several people, Mary Will included.

"It was the worst thing I could have done." Mary Will was sobbing now. "But I was so excited— I had no time to think."

Out of the murk of tule-fog and hatred and murder one dazzling thing flashed clear—and nothing else mattered. I was a happy man. "You did that for me!" I cried. "Mary Will—you're wonderful!"

"Then this is your knife?" Barnes broke in, holding it before me.

"No question about it," said I.

"How do you account for the fact that it was found beside the dead man?"

I turned in time to catch the look that passed between Parker and Carlotta Drew, and hot anger filled my heart.

"It was stolen, of course," I said.

"Of course," smiled the detective.

"I had not missed it yet," I went on, "but it must have been taken from my luggage, in the stateroom, sometime to-day. There were just two men who had access to that luggage. One was the dead man, who could hardly have taken it."

"And the other?" cried Mark Drew suddenly.

"The other," said I, "was Doctor Parker, who at seven-thirty to-night claims he was lost in the fog."

"Nonsense!" said Parker. "What motive ——"

"Motive enough!" cried Mark Drew angrily. "A secret love-affair with my father's wife that has been going on for more than a year. A lust for money that is famous on the China coast—along with your well-known lack of scruples in stopping at nothing to get it. Motive, my dear Doctor——"

"You think," sneered Parker, "that I would paw over this man's luggage—that I would steal his silly knife?"

"Why not? A man who would steal another's wife would hardly stop at the theft of a little weapon like this!" Drew turned to the detective. "Sergeant Barnes, this man claims that at the time the crime was committed he was walking from his hotel to this house. There are good pavements, good sidewalks, all the way. Let me call your attention to his shoes. They are unbelievably wet; they are muddy."

"Rot!" snarled Parker. "That means nothing. The sidewalk was torn up be-

fore a new building. I couldn't see where I was going. I got rather deep into the water and mud."

"You are in rather deep, my friend," cried Drew. "I'll grant you that."

Other hot words passed between them, but I did not listen. I had turned to Mary Will. "Whatever happens," I said, "I shan't forget what you tried to do for me."

"Oh—it was all wrong," she whispered. "I see that now. I have harmed you dreadfully—and I only meant to help. I did it on the spur of the moment. Why I did it I can't imagine."

"Can't you? I can. Your first instinct was to protect the man you love."

"No—no," she protested.

"Poor Mary Will. All your denials won't avail now. The deed is done. You supposed that I had lost my head—and killed Henry Drew."

"It was silly of me—I didn't stop to think. And everything looked against

you—I saw you running out of the window."

"Everything is still against me. Are you, Mary Will? Look at me." She raised her eyes to mine. "Mary Will—I did not kill Drew. You believe that—don't you?"

"I believe it," she answered. "Nothing will ever make me change."

"That's all I wanted to know," I cried.

All my depression, my gloom, was gone, and it was in almost a gay mood that I turned to face the detective. He had waved aside Mark Drew's insinuations against Parker and was standing before me.

"Mr. Winthrop," he said, "you had quarreled with the dead man. You claim that he and his partner, Doctor Su, had defrauded you. You admit all that. You admit that this is your knife which your sweetheart—this young woman—found by the body."

"Yes," I replied, "that's all true. I ad-

mit also that things look rather badly for me. But in spite of all you have discovered, I did not kill Henry Drew. As you go further into the matter you must find that out yourself. Surely there must be some other evidence—I don't know what it can be. Perhaps when you have talked with Doctor Su Yen Hun he can throw some light—"

The door opened and Riley came into the room. His great red face proclaimed him the bearer of news.

"Sergeant," he cried, "I went to Doctor Su's house, as ye told me to—"

"Yes, Riley."

"The place was dark. I rung the bell—four times—mebbe five—nobody answered. I knew it was important, so I went round to the back. The kitchen door was open—"

"Go on."

"I went inside. Sergeant—there wasn't a livin' thing in the house. Not wan. But he was there. Doctor Su Yen Hun, I

mean. He was layin' in the middle of the library floor—dead. Somebody'd got to him an' stuck a knife between his ribs!"

My heart seemed to stop beating. A moment of dreadful silence fell.

"Did you examine the wound?" Barnes inquired.

"I did," said Riley, proud of himself. "An' it was exactly like the wan poor Mr. Drew got. Yes, Sergeant—if you ask me —the same hand done for 'em both. I waited till Detective Curry arrived, an' thin——"

"Yes, Riley. Thanks. You'd better go back to your beat." As Riley went out Barnes turned to me. "This was Drew's partner in the Yunnan mine," he said. "The other man you say had cheated you?"

I tried to speak but the words would not come.

"Mr. Winthrop," the detective went on, "I'm sorry, but I have no other course——"

"Wait a minute." It was Mark Drew who spoke. "I beg your pardon, Sergeant. You are conducting this case, I know, but naturally my interest is keen. I tell you flatly I do not believe this young man is guilty of my father's murder."

"Thank you, Mr. Drew," I said.

"It's an old saying and a true one," Barnes remarked, "that there's a motive behind every killing. Find that motive and you've got your man. The motive in this case is clear—revenge."

"But there's another one of us who may have had a motive," said Drew. His eyes were on Parker.

"I can't arrest a man because his shoes are muddy," replied Barnes peevishly. "You know that. No—everything points to this young fellow. He had the motive. His story of his actions after the crime is ridiculous. His knife was found——"

"But before you arrest him," pleaded Drew, "there are so many matters still unaccounted for——"

The voice of Barnes was very cool and unfriendly.

"I recognize your interest," he said. "If there is any clew I have not considered—any matter you think I should investigate further——"

Mrs. MacShane came into the room, bearing a tray of steaming coffee cups. She placed her burden on a table.

"I—I hardly know," stammered Drew. "I'm not criticizing you, Sergeant, but—there are the fifty candles. Yes—by heaven—the fifty candles! There's mystery in them. Whose birthday is this?"

Mrs. MacShane suddenly lifted her head and came over into the center of the group.

"I know whose birthday it is," she said.

"You know?" cried Drew. "Then in heaven's name tell us!"

"Your father explained it to me tonight," the old woman went on. "He come into my kitchen with the fifty little

pink candles in his hands, an' he asked me to put them on the cake. 'If I may make so bold, sir,' I says to him, 'whose birthday is it to-day?' An' he says to me, 'It's the Chinaman's,' he says. 'It's Hung Chin-chung's.'"

"The Chinaman's!" Mark Drew cried.

"But why should my husband give a birthday party for Hung Chin-chung?" asked Carlotta Drew, amazed.

"Just what I asks myself, ma'am," Mrs. MacShane went on, "but Mr. Drew didn't tell me. He just repeated that it was Hung's birthday. 'Yes, Mrs. MacShane,' he says to me, 'Hung was born fifty years ago to-day in a little house near some queen's yard in Honolulu—out on that beach'—what is it now, the wan there's all the songs about? Oh, to be sure!—'out on the beach at Waikiki.'"

VII

On the beach at Waikiki! Mrs. MacShane's unexpected bit of evidence had a fantastic ring. I had never been to Honolulu, but instantly I heard the tinkle of ukeleles, the murmur of breakers pouring in over a coral reef. I saw coconut palms outlined against a vivid sky, the brown boys riding in, erect and slender, on their surf-boards. By what stretch of the imagination could all this be connected with the murder of Henry Drew?

I looked about that strange little group gathered in the gloomy room of the house on Nob Hill. Evidently they were all asking themselves the same question. Carlotta Drew and Doctor Parker exchanged a glance of surprise. In Mary

Will's eyes I saw the light of romantic memory; stopping off on her way to China she had known Waikiki Beach in the moonlight when the Southern Cross hung low. Detective Barnes stood blinking at Mrs. MacShane with what was, for him, a rather stupid expression. Suddenly Mark Drew leaped to his feet and began excitedly to pace the floor. Barnes turned toward him.

"Well, Mr. Drew—and where does this get us?" he inquired.

"I don't know," said Drew. "But it may get us quite a distance—before we're finished."

"I can't follow you," the detective replied. "Though it is a rather startling bit of news—I'll admit that. The birthday of Hung Chin-chung! Born fifty years ago in Honolulu. Your father thinks so much of him he decides to give him a birthday party. He goes to a lot of trouble to get candles, and—say, how long was the Chink with your family?"

"Twenty years," said Mark Drew.

"That explains it," Barnes replied. "Twenty years! If we could keep a servant twenty years we wouldn't stop at a birthday party. We'd give him a deed to our house and lot. Well—Mr. Drew gives the Chinaman a party; an eccentric thing to do, but then, he always was—er—different. And what of it? We can't argue that Hung picked this occasion to kill his master. Unless he was dissatisfied with the thickness of the frosting on the cake—or peeved because Mr. Drew made a mistake about his age." The hour was late, and Sergeant Barnes seemed a bit peeved himself. He turned again to me. "No," he said firmly, "it all comes back to this young man. He had a grievance not only against Henry Drew but against the other murdered man, Doctor Su Yen Hun. His knife has been found. He was caught running away in the fog—"

Mary Will was on her feet facing the

detective, her eyes flashing, her cheeks aflame.

"How dare you!" she cried. "How dare you insinuate that Mr. Winthrop is capable of killing a man! You should know better."

"How should I?" asked Barnes.

"Why—just by looking at him," said Mary Will.

Barnes smiled.

"My dear young lady, I'm mighty sorry for you," he said, "but all the evidence——"

"Once more," put in Mark Drew, "I'm going to ask you to wait."

Barnes said nothing, but turned and stared at him with annoyance plainly written on his face. Mary Will sat down again, and I gave her hand a grateful squeeze. Mark Drew went over to his father's wife.

"As you know," he said, "I have been out of touch with my family for the past five years. During that time what

should you say was the nature of the relations between Hung and my father? Were they as friendly as ever?"

Carlotta Drew stared at him coldly. She had not forgotten his recent snub of her; she never would.

"Your father and Hung were master and servant," she said. "That's all I know. I made no effort to pry into your father's private affairs. I felt that the details would be too—unsavory."

"Mr. Winthrop"—Drew turned to me—"you said a while ago that there were only two men who had access to your luggage in the stateroom of the China boat—my father and Doctor Parker. On second thoughts—wasn't there one other?"

"Yes," I nodded. "It had not occurred to me before, but Hung—Hung was frequently there. He spent the morning there to-day, packing your father's bags."

"Nonsense!" said Detective Barnes decisively. "This birthday party is a false

lead. If it means anything at all it means that Mr. Drew was fond of the Chinaman. And it must mean, too, that the Chink was fond of the old man."

"Fond of him?" repeated Mark Drew. "He ought to be, that's sure. My father saved his life!"

The detective stared at Mark Drew in surprise.

"Saved his life? When? Where?"

"Twenty years ago—in Honolulu. Let's see—this is the fifth of December—yes, of course, twenty years ago to a day."

Barnes sank wearily into a chair.

"Well, if you can make it short and snappy—I suppose I ought to hear about it," he said. "Though if the old man saved Hung's life it doesn't stand to reason that the Chinaman would—oh, well, go ahead."

Mark Drew leaned against a table and folded his arms.

"I'll try to be brief," he began. "As I

say, it happened twenty years ago, in December, 1898. I was a kid of twelve then. I'd gone to the Islands with my father aboard his bark, the *Edna-May;* he owned a fleet of sailing vessels that made Honolulu from this port. Every detail of that trip stands out in my memory, clear-cut to this day. And no wonder, for I was an imaginative boy, a great reader, and I was standing for the first time on the threshold of the South Seas.

"The day of which I speak was to be our last in port. Late in the morning my father invited me to go ashore with him for lunch. We went from the dock to King Street, and I was all eyes, drinking in Honolulu for the last time. Even in those days it was the melting-pot of the Pacific; a dozen races mingled on the pavement. But you don't want a description of the town. However, the picture returns and thrills me even now. We turned off King Street, into Fort. In front of a building that housed the

United States District Court we met a man named Harry Childs coming out. Childs was a lawyer out there, somewhat shady I imagine, but useful to my father, who traveled much in the shade himself—I make no secret of it. Childs carried a few law books under his arm as I recall, and he looked warm and depressed and rather sullen.

"'Well, Harry,' my father said, 'how did your case come out?'

"'Lost it, of course,' said Childs. 'That man Smith has it in for me. Oh, well—it's all in the day's work. But I'm sorry for poor Chang See. Shipped back to China—they'll put him on the Nile tonight. It's his death sentence, Mr. Drew!'

"'Too bad,' my father said. 'As I told you, I could have used him. Hung Chinchung died on the way over—there's all his clothes waiting for some one to wear them—and his name too. I could have landed your man in San Francisco with no trouble at all. Too bad.'

"Childs looked at my father in a queer way.

"'When are you sailing?' he asked.

"'About six,' my father said.

"'The *Nile* sails for China about dusk,' Childs said. 'If I were you I'd wait until it goes out. I'd wait—about an hour—or as long as may be necessary.'

"'I'll do that, Harry,' said my father. He smiled.

"'You might have a visitor,' Childs said, and went on his way down the hot street. My father and I went to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and had lunch.

"Of course, at the time I had no idea what this conversation between Childs and my father meant. I remember standing that evening at the rail of the *Edna May*, just before we sailed. The quick tropic dusk had fallen, Tantalus and Punch Bowl Hill were blotted out. From the row of shacks along the water-front came yellow light and laughter and the voices of men singing. My father hap-

pened along and ordered me to bed. He was robbing me of those last precious moments in port, and I resented it, but I dared not disobey. I went to his cabin and climbed to the upper berth, which was mine. In about half an hour the *Edna May* got under way. My wonderful journey was entering its final stage——"

"Please," broke in Detective Barnes, glancing at his watch.

"I know," said Mark Drew, smiling. "I'll hurry on. Pretty soon my father came to the cabin, sat down at his table and began to look over some papers. I dozed off—and woke up with a start. A lean, solemn Chinaman was standing just inside the cabin door. It was my first sight of the man whose birthday my father was celebrating here to-night.

"'You are Chang See,' said my father, 'and the *Nile* sailed without you.'

"The Chinaman bowed, and something resembling a smile flitted across his impassive face.

"'I see you've got dry things,' my father went on. 'Hung's clothes suit you all right—eh?' Again the Chinaman bowed. 'Well—listen to me,' said my father. 'I have called you Chang See for the last time. From now on you are Hung Chin-chung, the same servant I took with me when I left the Gate.'

"'I understand,' said Hung—I may as well call him that, for I have never known him by any other name. He spoke good English, even then. 'You have saved my worthless life,' he went on, and drifted off into a flowery sentence intended as an expression of gratitude. My father cut him short.

"'Yes,' he said, 'I've saved your life. And I expect something in return.' Of course he did. I was only twelve, but I knew he would, even then.

"'Anything you ask——' began the Chinaman.

"'I want a confidential servant—one I can trust—absolutely,' my father told

him. 'A man who will stick by me day and night, make my interests his, guard my safety. There are certain matters—my life has been threatened——Lie down, Mark, and go to sleep!' he added sharply, for I was leaning over the side of my bunk, wide-eyed. 'I've given you your life,' he finished to the Chinaman. 'Now I ask that you devote it to me.'

"Hung—or whatever his name was—thought for a moment. To his Oriental mind a promise was a promise, and not to be lightly given, even under such extraordinary circumstances. I am trying to be brief, Sergeant Barnes. I'll sum up the discussion that followed in a few words. Hung was willing to serve my father—but for how long? He said something about returning to China to spend his last days there. There should be a limit, he thought. After a time they set it at twenty years. This was the fifth of December, the anniversary of Hung's birth at Waikiki thirty years before.

From that moment on to his fiftieth birthday, he agreed to do as my father wished.

"I was pretending to be asleep. My father came over and shook me. 'Wake up, Mark,' he said. 'This is Hung Chin-chung. He has agreed to act as my servant for the next twenty years, if we both live that long. My friends will be his friends, my enemies his enemies; he will guard my life as his own, and every request I make of him, no matter how trivial, he will comply with. Is that right, Hung?'

"Hung promised on his honor and the sacred honor of his ancestors.

"'When he reaches his fiftieth birthday I will release him from his promise,' my father said. 'You are a witness, Mark. Don't forget.' He turned to the Chinaman. 'Now, go to your bunk. I'll have a talk with you in the morning.'

"How well Hung kept his word I know probably best of all. He became my

father's shadow. Into what unsavory paths his devotion led him I don't know. My father's activities were many—there was talk of the opium trade in those days. No doubt Hung was a useful go-between. Twice he saved my father's life when it was attempted by revengeful members of Hung's own race.

"To-day, on his fiftieth birthday, as you can see, his long period of slavery—there is no other word—was ended. I know my father had grown very fond of Hung, and there was in his nature an odd sentimental streak that no doubt led him to hit on the birthday party as a fitting climax to all those years of devotion. Probably it was not so much to honor Hung that he lit the fifty candles on the cake; he wanted to call the attention of the world to the remarkable loyalty that he had inspired and, in honoring Hung, honor himself." Mark Drew paused. "That's all, Sergeant. I'm afraid I haven't helped you much, at that."

"Very interesting, Mr. Drew," said the detective. "But it gets us nowhere—nowhere at all. It establishes beyond question that Hung was under an obligation to your father, that he was always very devoted to him——"

"Yes," said Mark Drew sharply. "But you forget that the obligation has been paid. To-day Hung was released from his promise—he was a free man again. What has been going on in his mind these twenty years? You and I don't know—we can't know. What white man could?"

"You mean to say," Doctor Parker put in, with what seemed to me a quite hopeful look in his eyes, "that you think Hung's first act as a free man was to murder his benefactor?"

"There's a bare chance of it," Drew replied. He turned again to the detective. "After all, there is a very thin line dividing gratitude and hate. If you saved my life to-night I should be grate-

ful. To-morrow, next week, possibly next year, I should still be grateful. But after twenty years—if you had reminded me of it every day—isn't it quite likely——"

A door at the rear of the room opened suddenly and Hung Chin-chung came in. Noiselessly, on his padded slippers, he crossed the polished floor to the long table on which Mrs. MacShane had put the coffee. His yellow face might have been hidden behind the curtain of a tule-fog for all the expression one could read there. He gathered up the stray coffee cups and piled them on the tray.

No one moved or spoke. Deliberately Hung lifted the tray to his shoulder, swung on his heel, and strode to the door through which he had entered.

"Hung!" said Barnes sharply.

Hung paused, turned so we could see his face, and waited.

"This was your birthday, eh, Hung?" said Barnes.

"Yes."

"The fifty candles—the cake—all for you?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Drew was very fond of you. Why?"

"Why not?"

"Answer my question!" The detective reddened with anger.

"I have served Mr. Drew with honor for many years," said Hung.

"And you were about to leave his service. Where are you going? What are your plans?"

"I return to China."

"On what boat?"

"I have not yet decided. That is all? Thank you——"

"Wait a minute! Tell me—you were very fond of Mr. Drew?"

"Why not?" Hung's hand was pushing open the door.

"I want an answer!" shouted Barnes.

"For one word," said Hung, "a man

may be adjudged wise. And for one word he may be adjudged foolish. I have spoken enough."

"Hold on there!" Barnes cried, for Hung was going out.

"Let him go," said Mark Drew quickly, and the Chinaman disappeared.

Barnes threw up his hands.

"All right—if you're handling the case," he said angrily.

"I should like to, for a few moments," said Drew, smiling. "Where the mind of an Oriental is concerned, one man's efforts are as good as another's."

"I was on the Chinatown squad ten years," Barnes retorted. "But if you know more than I do——"

"I know more about Hung perhaps. Mrs. MacShane—go to the kitchen. If Hung starts to come up-stairs by the back way let Sergeant Barnes know at once. He will pass the word on to me. Now, Sergeant, if you will lend me that flashlight you had in the garden——"

With surprising meekness Barnes handed it over.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Explore," smiled Drew. "We all have our pet theories. Yours inclines to this young man." He nodded toward me. "Mine, up to the time I understood the matter of the candles, favored our friend, Doctor Parker. I'm sorry to say I believe I was mistaken. I'm going up to find out."

"Hold on," said Barnes. "During those twenty years Hung served your father, do you know of anything that occurred—anything that might account for what happened here to-night?"

"A fair question," Drew said. "I'll answer it when I've had a look about Hung's room."

He went quickly up the stairs, and again silence fell in that cold and musty room. Mary Will moved closer to me on the sofa. Doctor Parker rose and lighted a cigarette, then with an air of assumed

carelessness drifted to the side of Carlotta Drew, who sat near the stairs. They talked eagerly in low tones; evidently they had much that was important to say to each other. Ignoring us all, Barnes sat staring gloomily into space. He seemed for the moment a discouraged man.

The bell of the telephone, which was in a closet under the stairs, rang sharply. Barnes jumped up and entered the closet, shutting the door behind him. We could hear his voice, faint, far away.

"Hello, Riley! . . . Yes. What is it? . . . Yes. . . . That's good. . . . Fine work, Riley. . . . Better take her to the station. Wait a minute—bring her up here first. Yes. Good-by."

When Barnes emerged from the closet his face was beaming. He said nothing, but ran up the stairs two at a time.

VIII

Mary Will put her hand on my arm. "What now?" she asked wide-eyed.

"I wonder——"

"I'm so worried. That horrid detective still suspects you."

"Nonsense! He can't entangle an innocent man."

"Yes, he can," said Mary Will seriously. "And he will, too, unless he finds the guilty one at once."

"Then let's hope he does. But—who is the guilty man? My choice is Doctor Parker."

Mary Will's forehead wrinkled in deep thought.

"No," she said. "I don't believe it was Parker."

"Then why did he try so hard to put the thing on me?"

"For the same reason Carlotta Drew tried to put it on you. They both honestly believe you did it."

"Mary Will—you talk like an oracle. How do you know all this?"

"Oh—I just know it. When Mrs. Drew and I were up-stairs and we heard the scream, I'm sure she suspected Doctor Parker. But the minute he reached the house, with you and the policeman, he took her aside and assured her he was innocent. I was watching them and I saw the look of relief on her face."

"Well," I said helplessly, "I'm all at sea. If Parker didn't do it——"

"Then Hung did," said Mary Will firmly. "Can't you see that?"

"Hung? Nonsense! Why, there's not a shred of evidence against him. He was in his room. Much more reason to suspect me. Oh, I certainly got tangled in a pretty mess when I came up here to-night."

"I meant to speak about that. You disobeyed me. I told you on the boat——"

"Tut, tut! Maidenly reserve, and all that sort of thing. I'm mighty glad I didn't pay any attention to it. Because, however it ends, this evening has taught me one wonderful thing. You love me."

"I haven't said so."

"You don't need to. Your actions have proved it."

"Don't be too sure. Maybe I pitied you. Have you thought of that? And pity—pity isn't love."

I have said that Mary Will could be annoying at times. Loving her, I perceived, would never grow monotonous.

"If I hear any more about pity," I said fiercely, "I'll kiss you."

"Then you won't hear any more about it," she answered quickly; and added, very softly, "Not just now."

At that instant we heard Mark Drew and the detective coming down the stairs.

Doctor Parker rose and walked to the table; when they came into view he was lighting another cigarette. Sergeant Barnes carried a little bundle of something or other, which he placed beneath the cushion of a chair. Then he walked solemnly up to where I sat.

"Well, my boy," he said, "I'm going to arrest you for the murder of Henry Drew!"

Mary Will gave a little cry, and her hot hand grasped mine. I was stunned—the thing was so sudden.

"This—this is ridiculous," I stammered.

Mark Drew came up and stood by the side of Barnes.

"The sergeant is a bit crude in his methods," he remarked. "What he should have said was that, with your permission, he is about to place you under arrest, as an experiment. You'll understand later. Do you mind?"

"Well, I—can't say I fancy it."

"It was my suggestion," said Mark Drew.

"Oh, well—in that case——" I agreed, somewhat less alarmed.

"Call Mrs. MacShane and Hung from the kitchen," said Barnes. "Get Murphy in from the back and Myers from the front." Mark Drew began to carry out these orders. "Now, my boy, if you'll put these on——"

He held out a pair of handcuffs which glittered wickedly in the dim light. I saw that Mary Will was very pale and frightened, and I wasn't feeling any too cheery myself. But I held out my hands. The lock clicked shut on my wrists just as Hung came in from the kitchen, and I thought that he stared at me with unusual interest.

"My investigation is at an end," said Barnes loudly. "You are free to go, you people. You'll all be wanted as witnesses, of course."

Mrs. MacShane went slowly up the

stairs. Doctor Parker had found his overcoat and was putting it on. Hung stepped forward to assist him, when Mark Drew spoke.

"All right, Hung," he said. "Go to your room. I'll wait here to look after things. You've passed your fiftieth birthday—I've not forgotten—you are your own master now. Good night, and good luck!"

For a long moment Hung looked at him. Then he bowed.

"Thank you," he said. "Good night."

He went silently up the broad stairs. Mark Drew waited about two minutes, then followed just as silently. I could see him stop in the shadows at the top, and stand there, as though on guard. Barnes turned to the two patrolmen.

"Come on," he whispered hoarsely. "Quick! Don't make a sound. Come with me." He led them into the dining-room, while we waited, completely at sea. In a moment he returned to the

hall, where he stamped noisily about for a few moments. He opened and shut the outer door several times.

"Now follow me," he directed, still in a whisper. "We'll all go back to the drawing-room and wait."

He led the way; Mrs. Drew, Mary Will, Parker and I followed. As we entered, Barnes turned down the lights.

Thus I came back to the room I had not seen since I left it to answer Henry Drew's pitiful cry. The fire had burned low, but the dying logs still sent forth a warm red glow. Again they were staring down on me, those stern Drews on the wall. I was acutely conscious of the handcuffs on my wrists.

We waited. From where I sat I could see that the yellow fog from the tule-fields no longer pressed against the window panes. By straining my eyes I fancied I could make out the dim outlines of an apartment house across the street. Was the tule-fog lifting?

The glint of firelight on my pretty bracelets must have caught the eye of Barnes, for he came over and, grinning, set me free.

"Thanks," I said gratefully.

"Temporarily, at any rate," he spoiled it all by adding.

He returned to his seat. Mark Drew came down the stairs and entered the room on tiptoe. He, too, found a chair. Our wait seemed endless.

"I don't think much of your scheme, Drew," growled the detective at last. "Silly play-acting, if you ask me."

He was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps in the dining-room. In another moment in the big door of the drawing-room Myers and Murphy appeared. Between them stood Hung Chin-chung.

"You win, Drew!" Barnes cried. He leaped to his feet, brisk, alive, delighted, and turned up the lights. "Hello, Hung—glad to see you," he chortled.

"He was makin' his getaway by a rope from his window," Myers explained. "We grabbed him the minute he landed."

"Sure—sure," said Barnes. "Well, Hung—that's the second time to-night the old fire-escape proved a handy invention, eh?"

Hung did not speak. He faced the detective with a dignity that was somehow pathetic and hopeless.

"Don't try that stony-stare stuff on me," Barnes warned. "I know you came down that way before. I—that is, we—I mean Mr. Drew here and I—found a few strands of the rope caught in the rough ledge of the window-sill." He passed round Hung into the hall, and returned with the bundle he had hidden beneath the cushion of a chair. As he now unrolled it I perceived that it was a pair of Hung's trousers, wrapped about a pair of cheap American-made shoes. "You're getting awful careless where you put your clothes, ain't you, Hung?"

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders.

"You are searching the lake for the moon," he said scornfully.

"Maybe we are," answered Barnes. "And maybe we'll find it too. Maybe the moon's dropped down from heaven—by way of a rope fire-escape." He went close to the impassive face of the Chinaman. "I've got you tagged, son, from the minute you left here to go to your room, just before dinner. Wanted to change your clothes, eh? To bring honor to your master, and your master's house. Was that the reason? I don't think so. Now listen to me—and correct me if I'm wrong: You went to your room. You put on these white man's shoes in place of those velvet slippers. You took the knife you'd snitched from Mr. Winthrop's luggage when you was in the stateroom packing Henry Drew's bags. You let out the rope of the fire-escape and dropped down into the fog. It wasn't two minutes to Doctor Su's place, by the back way.

He was alone there. Did you fix that? You put the knife in him. When you came back you saw Henry Drew in the dining-room. You slipped through the window and did for him. Before you could get back up by the rope route Mr. Winthrop was with you in the fog——"

"I remember," I cried. "Something struck me in the face when I was close to the wall of the house. It must have been the rope."

"Sure," said Barnes. "It was. Well, Hung, you and Mr. Winthrop played hide-and-seek in the fog. When he went out into the alley you locked the gate after him. Then you climbed to your room. You drew up the rope and put it back on the hook. You took off these shoes, all wet and muddy, and the trousers, wet and stained round the bottom from walking in the tall grass. From your window you could step out on the roof; you hid these things in a dark corner out there. But you overlooked the

mud on your window-sill, the mud on the floor. You put on fresh clothes and waited for the time when you were due to meet somebody—a friend. Where were you going—you and your friend? I'll gamble there's a boat waiting for you down at the dock; faked passports, maybe none at all; a bribe here and there—money will do a lot, eh? Well, Hung—I'm sorry. I can't let you go to meet your friend. But don't worry—it's all right. Your friend will be here in a minute to meet you?"

Even at that startling bit of information Hung allowed himself no look of surprise or of distress. Again he shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all up, Hung," the detective was saying. "You haven't got a chance in the world. It's as clear as day. Your first free evening in twenty years, and you spend it killing your master and your master's best friend. Is that your idea of a pleasant night off? Now that's

all from me. What have you got to say?"

"Nothing," answered Hung Chin-chung.

Mark Drew came over and stood before the Chinaman. For a long moment the beady little eyes looked straight into those of the dead man's son. Then, amazingly, they faltered, and Hung's chin fell upon his breast.

"Hung," said Drew, "I'm sorry—you must know that. But after all, Henry Drew was my father, and I was bound to find out who killed him if I could. Then, too, you had tried to involve an innocent man. I'm all at sea. I thought you were loyal to my father—I spoke of your loyalty here to-night. There can be no question of your guilt, but that does not solve the mystery for me. It only increases it. What, in heaven's name, was the motive behind all this?"

We heard the front door open and the sound of footsteps in the hall. Riley,

huge, red-faced, triumphant, came into the drawing-room. By one arm he led an amazing little captive, a Chinese girl who seemed not more than twenty. She was beautiful in her way; at least there was something intriguing about the sleek luster of her black hair, about her crimson mouth, and her figure, alluringly slender and lissom. Her face was very frightened; the dark eyes held a hunted look as they glanced hurriedly about the room—and then one of relief as they fell on Hung Chin-chung.

"Well, Riley," said Barnes, "where'd you pick this up?"

"It's as I told you over the 'phone," said Riley. "When I left this house to go back on my beat the fog was lifting. I went down California. Ahead of me, standing near the corner of Grant, I see a big touring car. I hurried up to it. When he seen me coming the driver, a snappy little Chink, tried to start his motor. It stalled. I come up with him.

I thought the tonneau was empty, but under a couple of robes I finds this bit of a girl. Just as I drags her out the car started an' the driver beat it. I thought you'd like to meet the lady."

"Delighted," said Barnes. He went close to the girl. "Who are you? What's your name?"

She shrank from him and said nothing.

"I know her," Mark Drew put in. "I was at her wedding ten years ago. She was only a child then—but there's no mistaking her. Her name is Mah-li, and she is the wife of Doctor Su Yen Hun."

"Doctor Su's wife!" cried Barnes. "Now we are getting on! A Chinese triangle—by all the yellow gods! I didn't know they had 'em. It's all up, kid," he said to the scared little figure. "Hung here has told us everything."

"That is a lie," said Hung in a voice like ice.

"Your husband's been murdered. You know that?" roared Barnes.

"I know nothing," the girl answered faintly.

"Where have you been to-night?"

"At the house of my father, Yuan-shui, on Grant Street. Since early afternoon I was there. My brother was taking me home in his car."

"Taking you home? That's a lie. Taking you to the corner to wait for somebody—somebody who was going to smuggle you on board a boat bound for the treaty ports. Come on"—the detective seized one white slender wrist–"who were you waiting for on that corner? Who were you waiting for—tell me—and tell me the truth, or, by heaven——" He gave her arm a brutal twist.

"Let the woman alone!" said Hung Chin-chung, and his voice sent shivers down my spine. "She was waiting for me."

"Sure, she was," said Barnes, dropping the girl's arm. "Now tell me all about it."

"To you," said Hung scornfully, "I will tell nothing." He walked up to Mark Drew. "To you—everything," he said. "Only to-night in this house you spoke of my loyalty, my devotion to your father, and my heart was heavy within me. And why? Because, but a little while before, I had slain both your father and his friend." He turned to the girl, Mah-li. "All this was to be," he explained, as though to a child. "Long ago the gods arranged it. And who is man that he should struggle against the gods?" Again he faced Mark Drew. "But because you have believed in me, have trusted me, you must know that I had good and sufficient cause."

For a moment he was silent while we waited, tense with interest. In the hallway the great clock struck the hour of three.

"Ten years ago," the Chinaman continued to Drew, "I first saw this woman, Mah-li. In the doorway of her father's

shop in Grant Street—the shop of Yuan-shui, merchant of curios. A girl of fourteen, slender as the bamboo is slender, dainty as the blossom of the plum, beautiful as a jewel of pure jade. I saw her there, and it came to me that the best in life was evading me—a wife, sons to worship at the graves of my ancestors."

He stepped nearer to Mark Drew.

"What you call love—that came to me, in my thoughts the slim figure of Mah-li was always swaying gently, like a bamboo touched by the breeze. I saw myself her husband. I heard the cry of my first-born son. Yuan-shui, whom I approached, thought it could be honorably arranged. But, as you know, I was not my own master. There was my honorable promise to your father. In this room with the firelight like two torches in his evil eyes, he listened to me while I told him how Mah-li had caught up my heart, and held it in her slender perfumed hands. I asked his permission to marry.

And why not? Could I not serve him as faithfully, even though Mah-li were also mine to care for? He did not speak. He was not pleased.

"Vanity! Vanity was the secret flame at which he warmed his hands, grown cold with many wicked deeds. He was vain of my loyalty to him; that cake with the candles is a symbol, a boast Selfish, cruel, he would not share me with the woman—he must have all my time, all my care, all my devotion. He thought I did not know. He was often a fool. He called into consultation his partner in evil, Doctor Su Yen Hun, an old man from whom the years had sucked all blood, leaving him a dry, unlovely husk. Between them they arranged it. Doctor Su had no wife living in San Francisco at the time. Your father took me on a journey to the south. When we came back it was Mah-li's wedding-day. She had been given to Su Yen Hun.

"Henry Drew made merry at the wed-

ding. That night in this room I saw his triumph blazing deep in his eyes. I hated him. I hated Su, his partner. Evil men, both of them, as like in their wickedness as the twin blossoms of the pear are like in beauty. Between them they had robbed me, and I swore that the instant I was free I would kill them both. To-day brought my freedom, and to-night I kept my oath."

"You waited ten years!" said Mark Drew softly.

"Why not?" said Hung. "Was I not bound by the chains of my honorable promise?"

Detective Barnes was reaching for those chill cuffs of steel that had lately been on my wrists. Hung stepped to the side of Mah-li and laid a hand on her arm.

"Do not grieve, little disappointed one," he said. "We are not to dwell together in the great house by the broad river in the village of Sun Chin. It is

the decree of the gods. For you—after you have put off the white garb of your mourning—there may be another, and a younger, husband. For me——"

"Put out your hands," growled Barnes, coming nearer.

"Once," said Hung, "in Honolulu, the city of my birth, I stood in the foreigner's court. It is a humiliation not to be endured a second time."

With a swift movement he turned his back on the detective. I alone stood between him and the fireplace and could see what followed.

I had last noted my knife on the table; how he got it I do not know, but now it flashed from his sleeve. The firelight glinted on the blade as, holding the handle in his two lean hands, he turned the point toward his heart. He took one dazed uncertain step, then fell, his black hair close to the dying fire, while from her tarnished frame above Henry Drew's first wife stared down at him. For an

instant, held by this latest decree of the gods, no one moved.

Then without a sound Mah-li dropped to the dead man's side. It was Mark Drew who snatched the knife from her hand and left her there on her knees, gazing at the motionless figure on the hearth.

He was at the end of the path at last, that Chinese boy born near Queen Emma's yard, on the beach at Waikiki. Looking down at him I was conscious of a feeling of pity—until I recalled the knife he had taken from my luggage. Then for the first time I realized all I had escaped. And quicker than the tule-fog lifting from San Francisco all gloomy apprehension vanished from my heart.

Henry Drew's party broke up in a sort of silent awed confusion. Under the flickering gaslight in the dim old hall Mary Will held out her hand.

"Good night," she said.

"Good morning," I answered, pointing

to the clock. "Where do you imagine you're going?"

"To bed, of course."

"You could never sleep in this house. Go up and get your hat."

"Get my what!"

"Your hat. We'll come back for your luggage later in the day. Just now I propose to take you somewhere to breakfast."

"Nonsense! I can't eat breakfast with you."

"Why not?"

"It simply isn't done—that's all," argued Mary Will.

"But it will be done this time. After breakfast I'm going shopping, and you may as well come along."

"Going shopping! For what?"

"For a wife. I understand the town is filled with beautiful possibilities. And I don't want to get your hopes up too far, but I may say that I'm considering you—very seriously."

"Don't be silly. It's three o'clock in the morning."

"And I love you just as I did at three yesterday afternoon. Peculiar, isn't it? Yes—I rather think I'll marry you."

"Not without looking around?"

"I'll glance the other girls over on our way to the license bureau. If I change my mind I promise to let you know at once. Now how about the hat?"

Mary Will hesitated. The hour was not much of a help to her in her delightful stubbornness.

"I'll—I'll have to change my dress too," she said and ran up-stairs.

In the brief space of half an hour she returned. Though the fog was gone San Francisco was still a hidden city as we walked gingerly down the steep side of Nob Hill. The sidewalk was wet and slippery. It was absolutely necessary to hold hands.

When we came out of an all-night lunch room near Union Square dawn

was breaking over the silent town. A policeman stood on a corner.

"How soon can we get a marriage license?" I asked him.

"Office won't be open till nine," said he. "Three hours and more."

"That's a long time to wait," I told him.

"I was that way once myself," he smiled.

I bought a couple of morning papers and we strolled into Union Square. There were great head-lines concerning the double murder on Nob Hill. Mary Will caught a glimpse of them.

"It all seems a thousand years ago," she said. "Let's not read about it."

"Certainly not. I bought the newspapers to sit on," said I.

I spread them over a wet bench. They served the purpose excellently. We sat close; Mary Will's lovely eyes were heavy with sleep. Gradually her head slipped down on my shoulder. The hat

she had put on was small and did not interfere. It seemed the hand of Providence.

The policeman ambled by, still smiling. "She's a pretty little thing," he said softly. "Good luck to the both of you!" And he went on his way, whistling *Annie Laurie.*

Day came. The square filled with sunshine. Busy workers hurried by—not one of them too busy for a curious glance toward our bench. Across the way, before my hotel, the carriage starter took up his position. He was fresh and gorgeous as the morning. The voices of newsboys became more insistent. I leaned over and kissed Mary Will's warm lips.

"Wake up," I told her. "It's your wedding-day."

THE END

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